

SPIRITUAL GROWTH THROUGH "GUIDED AUTOBIOGRAPHY GROUPS"
IN "BEGINNING EXPERIENCE" TEAM MEMBERS

A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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This professional project completed by

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has been presented to and accepted by the

Faculty of Claremont School of Theology

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ABSTRACT

Spiritual Growth Through "Guided Autobiography Groups"

In "Beginning Experience" Team Members

by

Lyn C. Juckniess

Guided autobiography groups are valuable in nurturing the spiritual growth of lay persons in any ministry setting. This project outlines how guided autobiography groups were used in two spiritual renewal retreats. This project also provides a new tool to measure spiritual growth which was administered before and after the retreats.

Guided autobiography groups developed by James E. Birren provided the model for six different themes of spiritual growth for which sensitizing questions were designed. Participants gave and received support and guidance in sharing their life experiences and in moving toward spiritual wholeness.

The theme of spiritual growth, as articulated by Frank Rogers, Jr., as the three-fold movements of the Spirit, provided the theological framework for the groups. Effects of participation were self-assessed on the Spiritual Growth Inventory. Scores show increased spirituality.

For this project alumni of Beginning Experience retreats serving as volunteer team members in regional chapters in two states participated in an intensive retreat called a "Spiritual Renewal Weekend." Beginning Experience, International, an ecumenical Christian peer ministry,

reaches out to persons who have lost a spouse due to death, separation, or divorce through a structure of support groups and weekend retreats. Team members, needing to continue to grow spiritually to effectively serve others who are hurting, found the guided autobiography groups to be extremely worthwhile vehicles for finding and extending support in their spiritual journeys.

First, this project recommends guided autobiography groups as an avenue for facilitating spiritual growth in lay persons who serve in any ministry setting. Second, this project provides sensitizing questions for six themes on spirituality which can be used in weekly support groups or on a weekend retreat of a faith community. Third, this project provides a new tool, the Spiritual Growth Inventory, with which lay people in ministry can assess their own spirituality. Fourth, this project provides a model for a spiritual growth weekend useful to any ministry leader and, in particular, to chapters of Beginning Experience developing a spiritual team renewal weekend.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Thesis

Guided autobiography groups used in retreats or weekly meetings can nurture measurable spiritual growth of lay persons in any ministry setting.

Overview

Faith communities aim to enable the spiritual growth of their members, so that they can carry out ministry as God calls them. This project outlines how guided autobiography groups were used in two spiritual renewal retreats. This project also provides a new tool to measure spiritual growth which was administered before and after the retreats.

Guided autobiography groups developed by James E. Birren provided the model for six different themes of spiritual growth for which sensitizing questions were designed. Participants of these groups gave and received support and guidance in sharing their life experiences and in moving toward spiritual wholeness.

The theme of spiritual growth, as articulated by Frank Rogers, Jr. as the three-fold movements of the Spirit, provided the theological framework for the guided autobiography groups on the retreats. Effects of participation in the groups were self-assessed on the Spiritual Growth Inventory. Scores show increased spirituality.

For this project alumni of Beginning Experience retreats who serve as volunteer team members in regional chapters in two states were the participants of an intensive retreat called a "Spiritual Renewal Weekend." Beginning Experience, International, an ecumenical Christian peer ministry, reaches out to persons who have lost a spouse due to death, separation, or divorce through a structure of support groups and weekend retreats. Team members, needing to continue to grow spiritually to effectively serve others who are hurting, found the guided autobiography groups to be extremely worthwhile vehicles for finding and extending support in their spiritual struggles and journeys.

Outline

Chapter 1 begins with the thesis of this project, introduces this project's major elements, and, at this point, provides an overview of the flow of this project.

Chapter 2 describes the essence and value of guided autobiography groups. In particular the usefulness of autobiography groups in enhancing purpose and meaning fitness is correlated to the goal of spirituality of meaning making. Reflections are provided on how a ministry leader can adapt themes and questions of guided autobiography groups for a focus on spirituality.

Chapter 3 spells out the spirituality of this project. The three-fold movements of the Spirit as conceived of by Frank Rogers, Jr., are described in full. Then this

theology is operationalized into 12 statements on the Spiritual Growth Inventory, a self-assessment tool developed for this project.

Chapter 4 informs the reader about the Christian ministry outreach to separated, divorced, and widowed persons of Beginning Experience, International. The theology, the nature of its programs, and the requirement of its lay leadership for annual spiritual renewal are set forth. This project's development and execution of a spiritual team renewal weekend retreat is suggested as a prototype for Beginning Experience.

Chapter 5 details the development of the spiritual team renewal weekend, providing the six themes and corresponding sensitizing questions for the overarching topic of spirituality. It contains a rich wealth of thought-provoking questions useful for journaling for years. This chapter also includes the advanced preparations made by this writer for the retreat.

Chapter 6 describes the two spiritual team renewal weekend retreats. The schedule, the elements of each theme's worship center such as visual aids, poetry, and music, the retreat leader's remarks pertinent to each theme, and the leader's offerings in large group reflection times and team building are detailed. This chapter also includes, anonymously, all of the evaluative comments of retreat participants.

Chapter 7 provides the results of the Spiritual Growth Inventory taken before and after the retreats indicating where participants assessed their own growth.

Chapter 8, as Conclusion, recommends guided autobiography groups for continued spiritual growth of lay persons in ministry and the sensitizing questions as a springboard for exploring and expressing one's spiritual development. Chapter 8 recommends the Spiritual Growth Inventory as a teaching tool about spirituality as well as a measuring instrument of spiritual growth. It also recommends this retreat as a model for a spiritual growth weekend useful to any ministry leader and in particular to chapters of Beginning Experience developing a spiritual team renewal weekend.

The Appendices lay out all the forms used in the project as well as photographs of the worship centers at the Spiritual Team Renewal Weekend.

Chapter 2

Guided Autobiography Groups

Guided autobiography groups, initiated and developed by James E. Birren,¹ can provide pastoral care to individuals, can serve as a vehicle for group pastoral care, and can be the context for training lay people to provide pastoral care. Guided autobiography uses selected life themes for personal reflection and writing. Sensitizing questions for each theme provided by the group leader are stimulants for participants to explore and express memories and current experiences. Participants in private time and space write autobiographically, in a manner similar to journaling. They answer the sensitizing questions on each theme which most intrigue them. Thereby they explore their life stories, discover their strengths and weaknesses and begin to come to terms with their lives and choices.

Assembled together in small groups, ideally seven to ten people including a facilitator, participants take turns reading aloud their writings, followed by sharing their thoughts and feelings. This sharing provides opportunities to develop new relationships, combat loneliness, experience acceptance, extend trust, deepen personal insight and spirituality, and give of themselves to others on a shared journey. They grow personally and spiritually in this

¹ James E. Birren and Donna E. Deutchman, Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults: Exploring the Fabric of Life (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991).

communal setting. As they review portions of their lives through journaling and in dialogue with the supportive group, they gain therapeutic and spiritual insight.

Guided autobiography, according to Birren, results in increased personal power, recognition of past adaptive strategies and application to current needs, reconciliation with the past, and development of friendships with other group members. Birren elucidates how autobiography groups can stimulate intellectual, social, and purpose and meaning fitness.

Autobiography groups can stimulate intellectual and social fitness. Intellectual fitness involves use of one's mind as a muscle, keeping one's mind active and engaged. As participants write their essays, read them aloud, listen to others' essays, and discuss experiences, they are contributing to the fitness of their intellect. Social fitness involves forming and maintaining relationships with significant others. As participants extend themselves in self-revelation through reading their writings to the group and actively listen to others' essays, they move from social isolation into community. In the group sharing process participants are emotionally touched by the impact of the life stories of others and affect their fellow group members with their own writings in unanticipated ways. Their authentic relating contributes to their social fitness and connects them to each other at a deeper level of trust.

Additionally, autobiography groups can enhance purpose and meaning fitness. This kind of fitness involves understanding one's life as more than random circumstances and occasional coincidences. It entails conceptualizing the patterns and flow that shape one's life experiences. This fitness includes the belief that one's life makes sense and can be goal-directed. Purpose and meaning fitness enhance one's self-esteem and sense of personal power that one can put together the pieces of one's past in a comprehensible picture, can take charge of the present circumstances which are controllable, and can influence the trajectory of one's future by goal-setting. In autobiography groups participants begin coming to clarity about the meaning of their life experiences in their writings. Then in reading and discussing their essays, they can stimulate one another to look deeper into the purpose of their lives and their intentions and plans to make a difference in their worlds. Becoming more fit in one's sense of purpose and meaning energizes the participants and opens them up for the unexpected.

A primary goal of spirituality is making meaning out of one's life, thereby opening oneself up to a vision of and energy for a fulfilling and purposeful future. Autobiography groups provide a context for receiving powerful refreshment from remembered experiences and people in one's history. They provide opportunities for

participants to catch glimpses of themselves in each other and thus see themselves more clearly. Group members can review the efficacy of their past successes and reclaim those adaptive coping strategies for present challenges. In autobiography groups, individually and interactively, participants discover what their lives have meant and where and how they will step forward into their futures. Participants will gain from this experience a heightened sense of self-esteem, personal power, and personal growth.

The following gains may be achieved from guided autobiography:² refreshing of memories of the neglected past; reinforcement and sustaining of motivation for life review; re-experiencing parts of oneself in others' stories; development of friendship and support; increased sense of personal influence and significance; recognition of past adaptive strategies and their application to current needs and problems; reconciliation with the past; resolution of past resentments and negative feelings; increased ability to see one's contributions to the world; and increased sense of meaning in life.

Guided autobiography uses designated themes which the leader pre-determines or decides upon as time passes in the life of the group. Birren provides nine theme assignments: "The Major Branching Points in Your Life," "Your Family,"

² Author's course notes from "Guiding Autobiography Groups," Professor William Clements, School of Theology at Claremont, Jan. 1995.

"Your Major Life Work or Career," "The Role of Money in Your Life," "Your Health and Body Image," "Your Sexual Identity," "Sex Roles and Sexual Experiences," "Your Experiences with Death or Your Ideas about Death," "Your Loves and Hates," and the "Meaning of Your Life and Your Aspirations and Life Goals."³ Birren also proposes two elective themes: "The Role of Music, Art or Literature in Your Life" and "Your Experiences with Stress."⁴ Birren encourages potential leaders of guided autobiography groups to develop their own themes to suit their participants.

For each theme, sensitizing questions are provided to guide group members to explore emotionally powerful aspects of their lives. According to Birren these questions "stimulate recall and reflection, expand perspectives, and initiate sharing."⁵ Group members are instructed that these questions do not intend to limit their writing. Nor do they need to answer the questions in order. They are to read them all over and then choose a few which grab them. The sensitizing questions keep them on topic and give group members a common meeting ground in small group sharing. However the number and diversity of questions under each theme give ample room for a variety of paths to be explored and group members can appreciate hearing how each person

³ Birren and Deutchman, 67-77.

⁴ Ibid., 77-79.

⁵ Ibid., 64.

uses divergent thinking on each theme.

Birren has written sensitizing questions for numerous themes but few cover areas of spirituality. Birren holds a humanist point of view and approaches guided autobiography as a secular psychologist. A ministry leader can compose his/her own themes and sensitizing questions on spirituality when developing a support group or retreat on the topic of spiritual growth for lay people in ministry. In Chapter 5 of this project, the writer provides the themes and questions supplemental to those of Birren.

Chapter 3

Spirituality

In order to nurture spiritual growth in lay persons in ministry an understanding of humanity's spirituality has to be developed. From that conceptualization a measurement tool can be developed.

The Three-Fold Movements of the Spirit

The theology elucidated by Frank Rogers, Jr., described as the three-fold movements of the Spirit, was chosen. This section of this project reviews the essentials of Roger's theology, followed by a section which describes the creation of the measurement tool.

The theological framework for understanding and eventually measuring spiritual wholeness considers three dimensions of spiritual growth, hereby constructed as three movements of the Spirit. Rogers entitled these as the Face of God, the Glory of God, and the Reign of God. This writer will describe each movement of the Spirit in detail.¹

Christian spirituality, according to Rogers, is being in relationship with God, responding to the gracious initiative already in the world, wanting to be with that God ever more fully, participating in the three-fold rhythm of God. Being spiritually attuned, a Christian finds oneself

¹ Material to follow comes from the author's course notes taken in "Spirit-Centered Education" at the School of Theology at Claremont, taught by Frank Rogers, Jr., Fall 1994.

with eyes opened, either gradually or suddenly awakened into the ground of God's grace by the work of the Holy Spirit. Holistically, that is with body, emotions, mind, and volition, a Christian lives in the Spirit. Acknowledging and renouncing the fallenness of pride, egocentricity, disempowerment and enslavement, a Christian receives gifts of humility, obedience, and empowerment from the Spirit, and thus steps into the fullness of human life. With an openness and receptivity to be moved and affected by others, a Christian reaches out and authentically connects to others as directed by the Spirit.

The first movement of the Spirit, beholding the face of God, is being soaked in God's presence. A Christian is aware of one's own brokenness and personal pain. Aware of falling short, a Christian encounters one's shortcomings, weaknesses, and failures. One comes face to face with one's own limitations. A Christian agonizes in the depths of suffering in one's own life. Casting aside both denial and rosy optimism, one knows personal pain and suffering as part of one's fabric. In this dark but realistic space, a Christian becomes aware of the love of God. One recognizes, experiences, and accepts the love of God. One finds God's grace and accepts and rests in that grace as a healing balm. A Christian experiences being securely held in the gracious arms of a loving God. The face of God with care and compassion smiles upon the suffering world, even yet feeling

its wounds. As the Spirit touches one's innermost depths with the love of God, a Christian feels centered and at peace with oneself and God. The gracious presence and love of God pulsates into a Christian through the tangible care of a supportive community.

This movement of the Holy Spirit called justification can be imaged as a downward motion, the descent of God to humanity in the incarnation, taking on the form of human nature in Jesus. For a Christian it is the knowing and encountering God in human form. In present trials and sufferings, in handicaps and defeats, in ill-advised choices and dead-end paths, God's gracious presence surrounds, holds, and sustains humanity. In this a Christian lets go of baggage, moves from defensiveness to an openness in relationships, holds oneself in care, and experiences inner peace and support from others.

The second movement of the Spirit, living in the glory of God, entails receiving God's delight in one's triumphs, successes, and joys and participating fully in life with God as the agent of empowerment. A Christian receives gifts from God and acknowledges and claims those gifts as coming from the Spirit. One sees oneself as gifted and unique and celebrates one's particularity. A Christian can esteem one's personal worth as God does and appreciate one's inner beauty. As the Spirit fills the person, one senses one's personal power. As God embodies power in the Christian, one

has the sense of personal agency, namely that one can control aspects of one's life and shape one's future. A Christian comes into a personal sense of empowerment. At God's invitation one steps into the fullness of life. In the second movement a Christian translates the love of God into one's relationships with others. One connects more genuinely with others. One relates more authentically with others. Therefore, one feels personally healed and relationally more whole.

This movement of the Holy Spirit called sanctification can be imaged as an upward motion, the ascent of humanity, God lifting one up as Jesus was raised up. For a Christian it is a transformation by God, wherein humanity is made holy. God sees Christians as the persons God created humans to be, that they actually already are. In this elevating movement the Holy Spirit empowers individuals and through God's love persons connect more honestly with each other. A Christian feels most alive and most oneself.

The third movement of the Spirit, carrying out the reign of God, is being propelled by the power of the Spirit's gifts inside oneself to offer God's grace to others. A Christian is a witness to God's justice and compassion and extends God's presence to others. Having faced one's own pain and embodying compassion for the wounds of others, one is able to give to others from one's own pain and healing. In the midst of the pain of the world, a

Christian is willing and able to share one's story of death and resurrection. One is challenged and willing to act redemptively with others in pain. Understanding and having experienced God's redemptive care in one's own life, a Christian is moved by radical hope that all will be reconciled. One reaches out, bringing healing to others' wounds.

In this third movement which Rogers named vocation, humanity is called into the world with confident hope to participate in the transformation of creation. The Holy Spirit stirs a Christian to bear the power of love, to embrace others, to breathe grace into human pain and suffering, to be committed to act with compassion, and to form a reconciled community of justice and peace. In the power of the Spirit one inspires and challenges others to redeemed wholeness. A Christian empathetically in touch with the wounds of the world and present to death is also assuredly in touch with the strong hope of redemption from God and exceedingly able to nurture life.

Spiritual Growth Inventory

For this project Rogers' theology of the three-fold movements of the Spirit was operationalized. Concretely recorded as statements, the characteristics of the movements of the Spirit were written down as markers of a healthy spiritual life. With great excitement a tool for assessing one's spiritual wholeness based on Rogers' model was

proposed. A decision was made to conceptualize each movement of the Spirit in four sentences.

In the process of describing and clarifying the three-fold movements, twelve statements were drawn up. The first four sentences refer to the first movement of the Spirit. Sentences 5-8 refer to the second movement. The last four sentences refer to the third movement. This writer proposed the follows.

Spiritual Growth Inventory

1. I encounter my personal pain and brokenness.
2. I embrace God's unconditional love and acceptance of me.
3. I feel centered and at peace with myself and God.
4. I experience God's love through a supportive community.
5. I cherish my uniqueness, giftedness, and inner beauty.
6. I experience wholeness as I let go of the past.
7. I feel empowered to take charge of my present and shape my future.
8. I connect authentically in my relationships.
9. I move with compassion toward the wounds of others.
10. I nurture life based on confident hope in God.
11. I give of myself through sharing my story of loss and new life.
12. I reach out to bring healing to others who are suffering.

This writer also proposed the alternate wordings

corresponding to the numbered statements on the inventory. Alternate wordings are located in Appendix A.

It seemed to this writer that three additional broad categories of Christian commitment needed to be added, so that persons assessing their spirituality would have the opportunity to reflect on and note their relationship with God, their prayer life, and their involvement in church. It was thought that adding these last overarching aspects of Christian life would round out the picture of spirituality in terminology familiar to laity and give those assessing themselves a satisfying feeling of completeness. The statements were drafted as follows.

- 13. I enjoy a life-enhancing relationship with God.
- 14. I enrich my life with prayer.
- 15. I deepen my involvement in the life of a church or faith community.

The preferred wording and the alternate wordings were distributed to twenty individuals for field testing. This writer requested that each person evaluate the wording options and indicate which ones were most understandable to them. Fourteen copies of the proposal were returned with comments. The field testers included two alumni of Beginning Experience who would not be involved in the planned Spiritual Renewal weekend, two Doctor of Ministry students, four students of Rogers' "Spirit-Centered Education" class who were familiar with Rogers' theology,

five Ph.D. in Counseling and Religion students serving clinical residencies in pastoral counseling, and one clinical supervisor who is a Fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. Their preferences were tabulated on a grid and their input was considered and discussed by Rogers and this writer until consensus about the best wording was reached.

In devising how to measure these spiritual characteristics, a Lickert scale was used. Feedback about the descriptive wording at each point on the continuum was solicited from the field testers. The following range of 1-5 was decided on.

1	2	3	4	5
not at all	little	some	much	very much

The final form of the assessment tool was produced as follows:

SPIRITUAL GROWTH INVENTORY

On each item below rate yourself by circling the number on the scale, 1-5, which most clearly describes you now.

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|------------|--------|------|------|-----------|
| | not at all | little | some | much | very much |
| 1. I face and acknowledge my personal pain and brokenness. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I trust in God's unconditional love and acceptance of me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I feel centered and at peace with myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I receive God's love through a supportive community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I affirm my uniqueness, giftedness, and inner beauty. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I experience personal healing & wholeness as I let go of the past. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I feel empowered to take charge of my present and shape my future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I connect authentically in a variety of relationships. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I feel compassion for the wounds of others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I live with confident hope in God in the midst of suffering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

11. I give of myself through sharing my story of loss and new life.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I reach out to bring healing to others who are suffering.

1 2 3 4 5

13. I enjoy a relationship with God that enhances my life.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I enrich my life with prayer.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I involve myself in the life of a church or faith community.

1 2 3 4 5

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Chapter 4

Beginning Experience

Beginning Experience, International, an ecumenical Christian peer ministry begun in the Roman Catholic tradition twenty years ago, reaches out to persons who have lost a spouse due to death, separation, or divorce. Regional non-profit chapters of Beginning Experience are found throughout the United States, Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, and New Zealand.

Those ministered to find support and guidance as they struggle through the grief process toward spiritual wholeness. They meet together initially in a nine-week support group and/or they participate in a 48-hour intensive weekend retreat. Beginning Experience offers additional follow-up meetings and support groups for those wishing to grow further personally and spiritually. Participants in all levels of Beginning Experience programs are given questions to reflect and write on (called "hot-penning"). In small groups they read aloud and discuss what they have hot-penned.

Alumni of Beginning Experience retreats who wish to serve as support group and retreat leaders are trained and selected as team members. In preparation for serving as a support group facilitator or as a team member on a weekend retreat, these persons have to answer autobiographical questions on designated themes and compose "talks" to be

read at support group meetings and on weekend retreats. Fellow team members critique these talks weeks before the presentation time giving suggestions for strengthening and revising. The talks must be approved by the team leader before being given. Team members wishing to serve on subsequent weekends are required to write new talks on other themes, thus exploring their continuing personal and spiritual growth.

Team members, as lay volunteers, commit themselves to one year in ministry through Beginning Experience. Customarily they agree to provide leadership in two nine-week support groups or on two or more weekend retreats per year. They commit themselves to attend an annual team renewal weekend for the purposes of ongoing personal and spiritual renewal and team building.

Team members of Beginning Experience are interested in all three types of fitness described by Birren: intellectual, social, and purpose and meaning fitness. They have committed themselves to reaching out to those needing healing from the loss of a spouse. They engage in writing autobiographical talks which they present in support groups and on retreat weekends. As group facilitators they journal by answering questions on themes along with their group members. They share of themselves from their writing in ways which enable participants to heal. These activities enhance the intellectual and social fitness of the team

members. They remain intellectually stimulated when called upon to express their life experiences in oral and written forms. Revising and polishing their presentation talks through several rounds of critique are great intellectual challenges. Connecting with and facilitating a group of strangers increase the social fitness of team members.

Team members find themselves dealing with purpose and meaning of life questions as they review their lives, recover from their marital loss, learn to let go of the past, and open themselves up to new beginnings for their future. As fellow journey-makers on the road of healing, team members take on the role of guide to participants who search for meaning in past and present relationships and purpose in their future as single persons.

Because no standard curriculum for a team renewal weekend on the topic of spiritual growth has been published yet, this writer undertook for this project the development and execution of a prototype of a team renewal weekend for Beginning Experience with a focus on spiritual growth. Because the model of guided autobiography groups is so similar and adaptable to the hot-penning and small group sharing in which team members of Beginning Experience are already well-versed, this writer chose it as the primary vehicle for expression on the team renewal weekend. This weekend was created to meet the need of team members of Beginning Experience to stay fit intellectually, socially

and in their purpose and meaning-making. In other words, the spiritual team renewal weekend retreat was provided as a resource for their personal and spiritual growth. The design of the weekend program follows in the next chapter and the description of two weekend retreats is laid out in Chapter 6.

The theology of Beginning Experience, as briefly spelled out in the "Manual for the Beginning Experience," focusses on "the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection living in us today."¹ After describing the indwelling of the Spirit with Matthew 28:20, Acts 17:28, and Romans 8:11 and God's unconditional love for us in citing Romans 8:37-39, the theology of Beginning Experience continues,

He lives His death and resurrection in us as the human beings that we are. The 'death' experience may be seeing oneself as half a person, incomplete without a husband or wife. To continue living with this feeling is to be half alive, unable to bring life to self and others. The 'resurrection' experience may be the opportunity, for those who find themselves single again, to see their situation as a time to develop those parts of themselves that may have been diminished by the marriage and to affirm themselves as total, vibrant persons.²

The vision of Beginning Experience is "that these people will work through their grief, be healed, transformed

¹ Josephine Stewart, Karen Lay, and Father E. Guy Gau, Manual for the Beginning Experience (Detroit: Beginning Experience Central Office, 1984), 4.

² Ibid., 4-5.

and free again to love."³ The mission is "to enable people to work through their grief and become healed, transformed and free to love. When we consider the spiritual underpinnings of the Beginning Experience we find ourselves at the heart of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus who lives, suffers, dies and is resurrected in us."⁴

Beginning Experience understands their ministry as enabling others to be transformed, to find their own answers and freedom. Team members view themselves as enabling instruments of God's power. All team members are taught the theology above, however not all of them experientially grasp it and can claim it as their own. Many team members grow in their spiritual understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus in their own grief and recovery as they continue in this ministry.

This project expands on the above understandings by applying Frank Rogers' theology described in Chapter 3. Spirituality in Beginning Experience team members is examined in light of the concept of the three-fold movements of the Spirit on the renewal weekend retreat in two ways. As described in chapter six, Rogers' theology was preached on during an ecumenical worship service. It was also taught as the retreat leader reviewed the meaning of each statement

³ Tarianne DeYonker, et al, The Vision of the Beginning Experience (Detroit: Beginning Experience Central Office, Inc., 1987), 3.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

of the Spiritual Growth Inventory in the final retreat session. The results of this assessment are found in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5

Development of the Spiritual Team Renewal Weekend

For this project an intensive retreat called a "Spiritual Team Renewal Weekend" was developed for team members of regional chapters of Beginning Experience in two states. The theme of spiritual growth, as articulated by Rogers, as the three-fold movements of the Holy Spirit, provided the theological framework for the design of the weekend. The tangible structure followed the model of "guided autobiography groups." Sensitizing questions on six different themes of spiritual growth were drafted. From these questions the divorced or widowed team members would write about their lives and share their essays with others in small groups.

Beginning Experience of Hawaii requires of its team members participation in an annual Team Renewal Weekend retreat from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. For that team this writer designed a 48-hour curriculum entitled Spiritual Team Renewal Weekend. Beginning Experience of Los Angeles provides one or more one-day team renewal experiences per year for its team members. For them this project's curriculum was adapted to a 33-hour time frame by dropping one overnight's accommodations and part of the program.

This chapter describes the development of the 48-hour Spiritual Team Renewal Weekend with adaptations for the

shorter retreat described when appropriate. First, the themes and corresponding sensitizing questions are provided. Second, all the advanced preparations for the spiritual renewal weekend retreats are spelled out.

Themes and Sensitizing Questions

The basis of the weekend retreat around which all parts were organized were six themes with corresponding sensitizing questions for reflection, writing, and sharing, using Birren's guided autobiography model. These themes formed the concrete base for spiritual growth and team building on the retreat.

The following six themes were developed to cover specific areas of life review: A Major Turning Point in my Life; My Family of Origin; The Aesthetic in My Life: Music, Art, Literature, Movies; My Spiritual Journey; My Spiritual Self; and The Meaning of My Life and My Life Aspirations. These topics were chosen because they address powerful issues and feelings which team members have in common. They show that reviewing significant steps in one's history leads one into taking charge of the present. They give a framework for one's spiritual development. They provide an opportunity to explore the meaning, past, present, and future, of one's life.

The themes progress in terms of increasing depth of self-exploration and revelation. "A Major Turning Point in My Life" is the first and least risky, for team members can

choose either a positive or a negative turning point. This theme was the starting point of the weekend, the orienting theme for use in the methodology of guided autobiography groups.

The following sensitizing questions were written for the first theme.

MAJOR TURNING POINT IN MY LIFE

1. About how old were you at the time of the turning point? The timing of an event is often very important. Did it happen too soon? Were you too young? Did it happen too late? Were you too old?
2. Who were the significant people involved in the turning point--father, mother, spouse, child, friend, pastor, teacher? (Often one notices that the same people are involved again and again in major life turning points.)
3. What were your emotions and feelings at that time? How intense were these feelings? (Sometimes our feelings in reaction to an experience are mixed or are changeable. Do not be concerned if your feelings seem contradictory or inconsistent over time. Life is contradictory and inconsistent.)
4. What are your emotions and feelings now? (Sometimes our feelings change over time. Something that seemed like a disaster when it happened may turn out to be a positive event later on and vice versa.) What emotions do you experience as you think about the turning point now?
5. What was the role of personal choice in the turning point? How much personal control did you have? Was the turning point completely out of your control? Who or what was the external influence?
6. What were the consequences? (Turning points change our lives in important ways.) In your view, what are the ways your life was changed because of this turning point? What effect, impact, consequences did it have on your life? How did this turning point intertwine or interact with your spiritual journey? How would your life be different if it had not occurred?

7. How did the turning point challenge or enhance your meaning making at the time that it occurred? How did it affect your spirituality?
8. At the time of that turning point, how did you experience God present or absent in your life? Looking back on that turning point now, how do you see God as present or absent in that experience? Was God's presence or absence helpful or not helpful?
9. Was the course of events in your turning point indicative to you of fate, destiny, God's plan, your own choices, random, or otherwise?

The first six questions above were adapted only slightly from Birren¹ and questions 7-9 about meaning-making, God's absence or presence, and fate/destiny/God's plan were added.

The second theme was "My Family of Origin" with the following sensitizing questions.

MY FAMILY OF ORIGIN

1. Who held the power in your family of origin? Why? Who made the decisions? How did you know?
2. Who offered support, warmth, and nurturance? Why? To whom did you go for comfort? In whom did you confide?
3. Which major family members have you been closest to? Why?
4. Which important family members did you know the least? Feel least close to? Why? Whom should you have been close to but for some reason were not?
5. Did you like your family? Why or why not?
6. What was best about your family? Worst about it? What were the strengths and weaknesses in your family?
7. Was there anyone in your family you were afraid of? Why?

¹ DeYonker, et al, 68-69.

8. How did you struggle in coming to terms with a difficult family member?
9. Who were the heroes/heroines in your family? The family favorites? How did you know?
10. What was the feeling tone in your family? (e.g. happy, sad, crowded, spacious, noisy, quiet, warm, cold?)
11. What were the major areas of conflict, problems, and issues in your family? Religion? Money? Chores? Parental discord?
12. What were the rules in your family, the "shoulds" and the "oughts"?
13. What events and experiences have torn your family apart or have made your family stronger?
14. Were you loved? How did you know?
15. In your childhood who were the significant people in your religious experience and/or who contributed to your understanding of yourself and God?
16. Whose faith stance were you closest to in your family of origin? An uncle who was a skeptic? A grandmother who taught you Bible stories? An aunt who took you to Sunday School?
17. What was your image of God as a child? Where did you get it?
18. In what ways was your understanding of God part of various aspects of your life as a child? Or was God confined to Sunday activities?
19. How do you experience the spiritual roots from your family? What were the spiritual seeds planted in your soul as a child? How did the seeds sprout and bear fruit later? What seeds did you need to dig up and weed out?
20. Which religious traditions in your home as a child have you carried on? Why? What new traditions have you established?

For "My Family of Origin" questions 1-7, 9-14 were

taken from Birren.² Questions 8 and 15-20 were added to address reconciliation, significant people in one's religious experience, family members' faith stances, image of God as a child, role of God in one's daily life as a child, good and bad spiritual seeds, and religious traditions.

The third theme was "The Aesthetic in My Life" with the following sensitizing questions.

THE AESTHETIC IN MY LIFE:

MUSIC, ART, LITERATURE, MOVIES

1. Do certain pieces of music evoke memories of times past? Which ones? Are they connected with old relationships? Happy Times? Times of struggle?
2. What does music do to you emotionally? Do you use music to alter your mood? How?
3. What kinds of music do you enjoy? Is music important to you? How does music touch you?
4. How do you feel when you listen to religious music? How does it inspire you? In what ways are you moved to action?
5. Who is your favorite musician? Why?
6. What is your favorite piece of music? Why? What does it mean to you?
7. Are you a musician? Do you compose, conduct, or teach music? Have you played or do you play a musical instrument? Which one(s)? Would you like to? Why? What does it mean to you to be a musician?
8. Is God in the music in your life? If so, how?
9. How do you feel about art? What kinds of art? Folk art, classical art, modern art, functional art,

² Ibid., 69-70.

abstract art, photography? Is art important to you?
How does art touch you?

10. Do you own art? Which kinds? How is that art important to you?
11. How do you enjoy art? Museums? Art Exhibits? Books of art?
12. How do you feel when you take in religious art? How does it inspire you? In what ways are you moved to action?
13. Who is your favorite artist? Why?
14. What is your favorite piece of art? Why? What does it mean to you?
15. Are you an artist? How so? What does it mean to you to be an artist?
16. Is God in the art in your life? If so, how?
17. What literary works have had an effect on your life? Which book(s) has/have been important in shaping your personality or your ideas about life? How?
18. Do you enjoy reading? Why? What kinds of reading do you do? How much? Is literature important to you? How does literature touch you?
19. How do you feel when you read or listen to religious literature? How does it inspire you? In what ways are you moved to action?
20. Who is your favorite writer, playwright, poet? Why?
21. What is your favorite piece of literature--book, essay, play, story, poem? Why? What does it mean to you?
22. Are you a writer/poet? How so? What does it mean to you to be a writer?
23. Is God in the literature in your life? If so, how?
24. What do movies do to you emotionally? Do you use movies to alter your mood? How?
25. What kinds of movies do you enjoy? Are movies important to you? How do movies touch you?

26. How do you feel when you watch movies with religious themes? How do they inspire you? In what ways are you moved to action?
27. What is your favorite movie? Why? What does it mean to you?
28. Is God in movies in your life? If so, how?

For the theme "The Aesthetic in My Life" in the section on music, questions 1-7 were adapted from Birren.³

Additions in question 4 and questions 8 included how music inspires and moves one to action and how God is in music. By design the questions on art paralleled those on music. Questions 9-11 and 15 were adaptations from Birren⁴ and questions 12-14 and 16 covered the inspiration and move to action from religious art, the meaning of art, and how God is in art. In the section on literature questions 17, 18, and 21 were adapted from Birren⁵ while questions 19, 20, 22, 23 on inspiration and action by religious literature, and God in literature were added. Again the section on literature paralleled those of music and art. Finally the questions on movies, 24-28, supplemented this theme to reach a generation which might favor this medium over music, art or literature. Again the questions on movies paralleled those in the previous sections.

The themes "My Spiritual Journey" and "My Spiritual

³ DeYonker, et al., 77-78.

⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁵ Ibid., 78.

Self" were created for this retreat by this writer from the input of students in "Guiding Autobiography Groups" at the School of Theology at Claremont, January 1995.⁶

Contributed questions came from Asian and North American Christians, including Protestants and a Roman Catholic.

From a composite of over 700 questions prepared for a homework assignment, this writer chose and revised approximately 150 questions and grouped them into 30 sets of multiple questions. Questions were then divided into three major categories. One category evolved into the theme of spiritual journey up to, but not including, the present. Another category included awareness of the Spirit, life in the Spirit, and response to God in one's life. Thus it comprised the theme of spiritual self. The final grouping of questions addressed the themes of meaning-making and futuring.

MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

1. What is your earliest memory of a spiritual nature?
2. How old were you when you first became part of a church or faith community? What are your memories from that time frame? Was that a positive or negative experience for you? How so? Are you still part of that community?
3. Who have been the most influential persons in your spiritual life, other than family members? How was their influence positive or negative? How did their influence shape you?

⁶ Contributors included Charles Aden, Abigail Atkins, Mary Bomba, Tamie Davis, Jun Ku Cheon, Jae Won Kim, Peter Kim, and Betsy Pittard Styles.

4. When have you experienced the presence of something or someone greater than you? Describe this experience. How has it affected your spiritual understanding?
5. Have you ever had a mystical experience? A conversion experience? A spiritual "heart-warming" experience? When? How did it change your life?
6. At what times have you felt closest to God?
7. What was the most memorable worship experience, part of a worship service, or mass you ever attended? Why?
8. Where have you most felt the presence of God--in a church, at a beach, in the mountains, in a forest, at a camp, in a park, at a concert, in a museum, at home? Were you alone, in a group, or in a crowd? Was it expected or unexpected? What was it like? Did you tell anyone about it? If so, how did that person respond? How did you feel about it at the time? How do you feel about it now?
9. When has your faith, religion, or belief been of great help to you? When has it let you down?
10. How have major life transitions changed your spirituality?
11. When have you re-evaluated your relationship with God? What brought on the re-evaluation? What was lacking? What steps did you take? What new dimensions did your relationship with God take on? What are the benefits of this relationship now?
12. Have you had a peak experience spiritually? How did you feel? How did that experience change your view of life? How did it affect your spiritual journey?
13. Have you experienced a miracle? What happened? How did you feel? How did it affect your spiritual journey? Have you ever hoped for a miracle and not received it? How did you feel?
14. How would you describe movement on your spiritual journey? Fits and starts? Smooth, steady progress? Plateaus? Rollercoaster? More ups than downs or vice versa?

MY SPIRITUAL SELF

1. Who is the most spiritual person you can think of (deceased or living)? Which spiritual qualities do you

admire in this person? Which qualities do you see in yourself?

2. How has your spirituality affected romantic relationships in your life? Did your spouse share your beliefs about God? What difference did this make in your relationship?
3. With whom do you share your spiritual self now? Why this person? How do you share?
4. Is spirituality something you have to work at in your life or does it happen naturally? Give examples.
5. Which hobbies, interests, activities, or chores have a strong spiritual dimension for you or express your spirituality? In what ways?
6. What happens to you when you pray? What happens to others? How does prayer change your relationship to others? To God?
7. How does your spirituality empower the personal growth of others? Whom do you touch? How do you know? How do you feel?
8. Have you ever felt embarrassed about your spirituality? What precipitated this? How did you react? Has your spirituality ever gotten you into trouble? How?
9. As you encounter personal limitations, how does your faith help or hinder you?
10. What experiences in your life have separated your spirituality from religion? How did you feel? What did you do? Did you talk over your reaction with anyone? How has this impacted your spirituality?
11. In your life were there "religious leaders" who were not spiritual? How did you feel? What did you do? Did you talk over your reaction with anyone? How has this impacted your spirituality?
12. What role has/does doubt played in your life? What caused/causes you to question your spiritual self? What did/do you doubt? How did/do you deal with your doubt?
13. When have you felt spiritually dried up? When have you felt unconnected to God, to church or a faith community? What was happening in your life at that time? What adjectives would you use to describe your

feelings and state of being then? How did this spiritual dryness affect you emotionally, mentally, physically, and socially? Did this experience of dryness resemble a form of death? If so, how? Did your coming out of the dryness seem like a resurrection? If so, how? How did you resolve this "desert" experience?

14. When have you felt spiritually nourished? What activities or experiences nourish your spiritual life?
15. Who or what has wounded or harmed your spirit? How were you affected? What did you do to take care of yourself? How did you recover or heal? In what ways are you still affected?
16. Remembering a tough time in your life, how did you sustain yourself? Or how did God sustain you? Were you encouraged by specific prayers, songs, or Bible verses? Which ones? Did people offer or provide vital encouragement or support? Who and how? Were you able to ask for and receive support? How did you feel when receiving help? What was the role of your faith during the tough time? How was God involved in the process of sustenance?

The sensitizing questions on the spirituality themes used on the retreat were all-encompassing and extremely exciting to this writer. They were full, heavy, comprehensive and challenging. The design of the questions was to provide entrees into spirituality from as many vantage points as possible, not being tied into vocabulary specific to any denomination, other than the word "God." All effort was put forth to draw upon expressions inclusive of the range of spiritual experience.

For the last theme, "The Meaning of My Life and My Aspirations," the following sensitizing questions were developed.

THE MEANING OF MY LIFE AND MY LIFE GOALS

1. What are principles that guide your life? What are your standards? What does it mean if you do not live up to them? How do you feel? How do you continue?
2. What has/have been your purpose(s) in life? Has/have your purpose(s) changed?
3. What in your life is worth living for? What have you accomplished? Where do you fail? What haven't you yet accomplished and hope to fulfill? What do you imagine your life will be like 5 or 10 years from now? How will you make it happen?
4. What have you discovered makes for fulfillment in your life? How did you come to this realization? How do you try to pass on this hope of fulfillment? To whom?
5. Do you find meaning in ideals, such as social justice, equality, posterity, fellowship of humanity? How do you act on these ideas?
6. Do you want to emulate a great figure from history? Who are your moral heroes/heroines? Have they changed over time?
7. Reviewing your life, what parts do you wish that you had lived differently? Would God have figured into the picture differently? If so, how?
8. What has been entrusted to you as its steward and how have you carried out that responsibility? (for example: family members, animals, environment, estate)
9. How have your spiritual values informed your aspirations? Regrets? Feel at peace?
10. In the midst of personal suffering and suffering all around you, is hope an anchor for you? Hope in whom or what? How does hope inform your feelings and your actions? Have you ever been without hope? How did you cope?
11. Have you ever found life meaningless? Did you despair? How did you resolve it?
12. What kinds of different long-range goals do you have-- social, personal, universal, moral, spiritual? How important are which ones? How have your goals changed?
13. How would you describe your life using a metaphor?

14. Does God/you have a plan for your future? What is it? How does God reveal it or how do you know?
15. Within your spirituality what do you want to pass on to your children, grandchildren, or other children who are close to you?

Questions 1, 2, 5, 6, and 11 drew on Birren.⁷ The other questions composed by the writer included purpose, accomplishments, failures, fulfillment, stewardship, spiritual values, feeling at peace, hope in suffering, metaphor for one's life, important long-range goals, God's part if one had lived differently, God's plan for one's future, and spiritual legacy.

Advanced Preparations

This writer talked with the presidents of the two chapters and the renewal registrars several times on the phone and eventually in person to plan the spiritual team renewal weekend retreats. Once a date and retreat site were secured, an invitation letter was drafted. (See Appendix B for Hawaii's letter of invitation.) All team members of Beginning Experience of Hawaii and of Los Angeles received a letter of invitation two months prior to the retreat sent by the presidents of their respective chapters. The letter referred to their need for periodic spiritual refreshment and personal renewal and the opportunity for reflecting on aspects of their emotional healing and spiritual journey. Benefits of participation would include deeper communication

⁷ Birren and Deutchman, 76-77.

and communion with themselves in writing, discovery of the many resources used in Beginning Experience already inside themselves and connection to each other as members of Christ's body in this shared ministry.

Team members were asked to commit themselves to the entire time period, to write on all assigned themes on the renewal weekend, to register and pay ahead of time, and to complete and return by mail the Spiritual Growth Inventory before the retreat. The weekend was described as a time for deepened friendships and mutual support and would include relaxing, games, music, socializing, and food. Partial scholarships for travel and weekend expenses in Hawaii were provided.

Registrants were asked to provide the following information: age, church, single status: separated/divorced/widowed, single since when, when they did their first Beginning Experience weekend, when they came on team, and what they would like to get out of the Team Spiritual Renewal Weekend (see Appendix C).

Upon receipt of their registration form, they were sent two copies of the Spiritual Growth Inventory (See Appendices D and E). The 15 statements to be rated and the rating scale were identical. But the time periods for which they were asked to rate themselves were different. The instructions in the confirmation letter (see Appendix F) were as follows. "Fill out the first Spiritual Growth

Inventory, rating yourself as you were prior to your first B.E. weekend, indicating the month and year of that weekend. On the second Spiritual Growth Inventory rate yourself now, filling in today's date. Mail both forms immediately in order to have them tabulated...prior to the renewal.... At the conclusion of the team spiritual renewal you will complete the Spiritual Growth Inventory one more time, assessing your growth over the weekend."

The reason the team members were asked to take the inventory twice at one setting was to increase the reliability of the results. It was assumed that they would read more carefully and make more discerning judgments when completing the inventory for two time periods.

After the inventories were received this writer met with the president of each chapter to assign the registrants to small groups of 4 or 5. Team members were afforded the opportunity to meet together in small groups with other team members that they may not have known well nor previously co-facilitated with on a Beginning Experience weekend. The purpose of the groups was to enable each team member to grow spiritually in a supportive environment. This was to be accomplished by team members reading their writings, sharing past and current personal experiences and problems, and assisting each other to envision their most wholesome futures.

Then the weekend retreat schedule for each chapter was

fleshed out in detail (see Appendices G and H). In each program time centering around a theme, items for the worship center, a poem, and a song were selected, pages of questions were reproduced, and comments and discussion questions for large group reflection and exercises for team building were composed. Supplies, meal times, and recreational activities were confirmed.

In Hawaii, Friday evening covered Theme 1. Saturday covered Themes 2-4. Sunday covered Theme 5 and 6. In Los Angeles, Saturday covered Themes 1 and 2. Hawaii's Theme 3: "The Aesthetic in my Life" was omitted due to Los Angeles' shortened schedule. Saturday evening covered "My Spiritual Journey." Sunday covered the last two themes.

This writer also put together the Confirmation Letter (see Appendix F), the participants' Evaluation of the Spiritual Renewal Weekend form (see Appendix I), and the Release of Information form (see Appendix J).

Chapter 6

Execution of Two Spiritual Team Renewal Weekends

Description

Registrants in Hawaii (17) ranged in age from 37 to 72 with the majority of them in their 40's and 50's. Four were widowed and 13 divorced. Seven were Roman Catholic, 8 Protestant, and 2 non-affiliated. Four had served on team one year or less. One had been with Beginning Experience for almost 10 years. Registrants in Los Angeles (33) ranged in age from 31 to 65 with the majority of them in their 40's and 50's. Four were widowed, 4 separated, 1 never married, and 24 divorced. Twenty-eight were Roman Catholic and 5 Protestant or non-denominational. Seven were team members less than one year and 4 had been with Beginning Experience over 10 years.

Registrants in Hawaii indicated that they wanted spiritual and personal growth from the weekend (9 on each topic) and direction for their future (4). Registrants in Los Angeles indicated the following hopes for the weekend: spiritual growth (17), personal growth (9), direction for their future (4), and to build relationships with team members (4).

Team members arrived eager to see one another and to begin the retreat experience. Friday evening after dinner in Hawaii began with welcome, introduction to the weekend, announcements, ground rules of full participation and

confidentiality, thanks for completing the Spiritual Growth Inventory, signing of the release of information (see Appendix J), background about this project including definition of terms, and the weekend schedule (see Appendix G). Team members consented that statements made in the large group could be used in this project anonymously. Team members' reasons for coming on the weekend were summarized and the focus on spiritual growth was described.

The following brief reflection, by this writer on the inclusive meaning of Spirit and on the purpose on the writing and sharing was given.

What is Spirit? Spirit and human spirit are intertwined. Spirit, God's Spirit, interpenetrates all of life. Not much of life is not Spirit. Spirit is also peak experiences, the sense of awe, the presence of the Holy. Spirit and breath, "ruach" as breath of life, the source of creation, are the same. And on the other side we also know what it is like to have a neglected, starved spirit. We experience restlessness, pushing us to find God. This weekend will give you the opportunity to tease out the Spirit in various areas of your life. This time together we can anticipate will be therapeutic, a time which speaks to your spirit, a deepening experience.

You will be given ample time to write. Use your pens and let your feelings flow. Practice "hot-penning." When you hesitate to write you are being self-protective. So take a small risk. Answer a few questions on each of the themes you will receive. Writing will objectify your experiences. Then you can step back, examine it, feel it, change it, or gain new insight into yourself. You might want to write more than you want to share. That's alright. It's not the purpose of the group to push you to share more than you are comfortable with. As you listen to each others' writings you will more than likely see glimpses of yourself. These bridges will provide new contexts for friendship and support.

In addition to addressing your spiritual and

personal growth, these themes and sensitizing questions will inform you about your life's purpose and meaning fitness. Your reflection will enhance your self-esteem, show you how you can influence your life, set goals for the future, follow your life trajectory, energize you, and open you up for the unexpected.

Each of the six program times centered around a theme. Each included a 15-minute focus in large group on a worship center, poem, song, and prayer designed for that theme, 60 minutes of writing time, 60 minutes of reading aloud and sharing in small groups, and 15-30 minutes of large group reflection and team building.

Each team member received a folder divided into sections with seals. The words of the poem, song, sensitizing questions, and writing paper for each theme were opened as the weekend program times unfolded.

Theme 1 was "A Major Turning Point in My Life." The worship center displayed on a card table in the center of the circle of chairs in the large room, set on a white linen table cloth, included flowers in a vase, a large lit white candle representing the presence of the Spirit, the Beginning Experience symbol (a large carved wooden cross with an anchor and a sunrise) and a Beginning Experience scarf.

A poem entitled "My Special Place" by Barbara Bryant¹ about coming to God daily, praying and receiving answers in

¹ Barbara Bryant, "My Special Place," in Beginning Again (College Station, Tex.: n.p., 1990), 15.

a special quiet place, was read aloud. A song by Don Francisco, a Christian folk ballad composer, guitarist, and singer, called "Love Is Not a Feeling"² was introduced and then played. The primary message of the song was that love is an act of one's will.

The questions were introduced in the following manner.

In answering questions on a major turning point in your life as you see the efficacy of your past successful strategies, you can reclaim those adaptive coping strategies. Your writing can give you a great sense of reconciliation with your past. As you describe a negative turning point, perhaps you can resolve some of that negative you've carried. As you describe a positive turning point, you can see how your life made a difference in your family and world. As you explore your life trajectory, you can contrast how you felt then with how you experience your life now. Overall you can come to some conclusions as to how your life makes sense.

The team members read the sensitizing questions silently. Then the following instructions were given.

Choose a few sensitizing questions to write on, use divergent thinking in answering them. There is not one right answer. Describe your experience every way possible. Aesthetically. Get into it and walk around in it. Experience it from all different angles.

In your small group foster warm acceptance. Use active listening skills. Give genuine care and unconditional love. Look for linkages across the group. Notice similarities. Your goal in relating to yourself is to be comfortable with where you are today, without stripping down. Your goal in relating to others is to have empathy, to allow others to have pain without trying to solve it, to allow group members to be right at that point in their lives. Allow for complexities. Allow for quiet and silence. Remember group norms

² Don Francisco, "Love Is Not a Feeling," The Early Works (Nashville: Benson Music Group, 1991), audiocassette.

of beginning and ending together and confidentiality.

You will find that you have been genuinely impacted by others' writings. At the end of a group session if you finish early, you may choose to discuss how the process is going for each of you and the impact it is having. Accenting the positive will maximize when it is going right.

The team members asked a few procedural questions, were led in prayer and dismissed to their quiet places to write. One hour later at the ringing of a bell the team members met in five pre-determined small groups where each in turn read his/her writing aloud and the groups of three or four discussed feelings expressed in shared experiences. A candle and facial tissues were available in each small group room. At the ring of the bell one hour later each group closed with a prayer circle and team members exchanged hugs.

Team members returned to the large room for large group reflections, feedback, and team building. The group was asked how the process was working and how they approached the task of answering these questions. Many affirmative comments and nods were given. Most of the discussion centered around choosing a single major turning point. Some could not narrow down to one. Some chose a turn which extended over a number of years. Some wondered about choosing a positive or negative turning point or the "wrong" or "right" one. One renamed it an "influential experience."

Another topic of discussion was the internal response on the part of some upon being told that they would have to read their writing aloud. Beginning Experience of Hawaii

team members, unlike Beginning Experience of Los Angeles team members, do not as routinely read aloud their "hot-penning." Once they set aside their censors they found themselves coming in touch with their emotions.

The weekend retreat in Los Angeles on Saturday morning began much as it did in Hawaii (see Appendix H). Theme 1 was introduced similarly with the same worship center (without the carved symbol), reflections, poem, song, sensitizing questions, and a prayer (given by a chosen team member rather than the retreat leader).

After writing team members met in 9 groups of four or five. When they reassembled in the large room, they discussed how they approached the task of writing. Some of their comments follow. "I read all the questions through first." "I had answered all this before so I just had to go to hot-penning (freely associating in journaling)." "The questions seemed to intertwine." "I let go of the questions and went to my heart." "My turning point forced the greatest amount of growth, so I had lots to write about since then." "I looked at one question at a time, so I wouldn't have it all in my head." "Was it to be a negative or positive turning point?" was asked by a few. "What was the turning point was not asked, so I was confused, so I went from my head to my heart." And a couple of persons recounted how they started out writing on a past turning point but ended up where they are now, at another turning

point.

After the large group meeting, Hawaii team members enjoyed socializing until bedtime while pins with rainbows and butterflies were placed on their pillows.

Saturday morning after breakfast in Hawaii (Saturday after lunch and group games in Los Angeles) team members sat in the large circle around the worship center for Theme 2, "My Family of Origin." The table covered with a crocheted pastel baby blanket displayed childhood items such as toddler socks, stuffed animals, a troll doll, a truck, a ball, a pack of cards, stickers, candy, and the large white candle.

Team members were invited to take stickers to decorate and personalize their notebooks and to enjoy some candy if they desired.

Another poem by Barbara Bryant, "Little Tennis Shoes,"³ about memories of a child and a parent playing in a park was read aloud. A song written by Jesse Winchester and sung by Mary Black "Lay Down Your Burden,"⁴ was introduced and played. The refrain referred to a mother comforting her child.

The sensitizing questions were introduced by the possibilities that memories of happy and not so happy

³ Barbara Bryant, "Little Tennis Shoes," in Beginning Again (College Station, Tex.: n.p., 1990).

⁴ Mary Black, "Lay Down Your Burden," The Holy Ground (North Hollywood, Calif.: Gifthorse Records, 1993), audiocassette.

childhoods would arise; that positive memories and memories that need healing would emerge; and that they would attend to their playful child and/or their wounded child. The team members read the questions silently, were led in prayer, and dismissed to write.

After the journaling hour and the hour of reading and sharing in small groups, team members again assembled in the large room. They discussed how the questions served as a help to them.

Their comments follow, first from Hawaii, then from Los Angeles.

"I usually have to follow the questions one by one, but here I read them all and put them away and wrote." "I read all the way through and did not go back to the questions. The questions had identified the place for me to go and I followed the theme." "I wondered about the order of the questions. I skipped the first ones and maybe I will go back." "There were so many questions and not enough time that I felt disconnected. If I jumped over some I started feeling some movement in myself." "The questions were like a smorgasbord and I still want to get it right." "I didn't need to go back to the questions, I could go with the flow."

"I thought the questions were not hard to answer. Then I found how much I resist new insights to what I thought was resolved. So I have a lot to answer." "The questions brought up subjects I've had to deal with. I've already

dealt with the negative and am over it. So I found I was dwelling now on the more positive." "I felt myself rambling over the past several years, bringing up old stuff in order to have something to say." "I don't really want to rehash old stuff and dredge it all up, so I did it superficially. That's not what I wanted to do." "On this relationship stuff as I went back into my family, this is the first time with a group that I've verbalized my sharing. It got my emotions flowing which is another part of the healing. I still want to keep doing it." "It was easy to write on a marvelous childhood; in adulthood I had the problems." "I found myself relating my past to my present." "I didn't want to write about something not normal. The group was telling me why I was here. I wish I had more time to work on it after group." "None of us finished writing, even though we had thought that we were done." "I can answer for the next few centuries." "Having to read it gives it a different flavor."

The team members from California wrestled with how the questions stirred them on the inside. "They were hard questions for me as a perfectionist. I didn't take them literally; they were thought provokers, memory provokers, my sensory awarenesses rather than my emotions." "I see how much I've grown. I scanned all and wrote on all of them briefly until I came to question 20; then two pages came out, all of a sudden it hit me." "Some questions stirred

and provoked confusion, but then writing opened curtains and clarified my life." "I was an observer of facts, no more anger or guilt, that's what I've worked through, but then I took a couple of pages on question 19." "Some areas of my life have closure but in others the questions made me stop and consider. I didn't go through them as a checklist."

"On one question I just took off and zeroed in." "The questions were easy but I became confused." "I could get out of my heart and into my head going through them until I got to the spiritual questions." "I've never dealt with the spiritual side of my family of origin so it was thought-provoking." "As a child I felt pain and as an adult I now understand; it's interesting but still confusing." "I got in touch with the moment when I shut down spiritually." "I looked at the spiritual threads from my family."

Following lunch and group recreational time, team members in Hawaii gathered around the worship center for Theme 3, "The Aesthetic in My Life: Music, Art, Literature, Movies." The table was covered with a woven blanket. On top were the large lit candle, bunches of grapes and a brass trivet of grapes and vines. Freshly-cut vines wove on and around the center. The vines represented connectedness to the aesthetic elements in their lives, to creation, and to each other.

Another poem by Barbara Bryant, "Friends,"⁵ based on Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, about God's healing through the listening of a friend, was read aloud. The song, "All My Relations," composed and sung by Denean, a Native American woman, was introduced and played.⁶ The sensitizing questions were introduced in their four sections with instructions to choose only one section. After reading the questions silently, the team members were dismissed with prayer to their writing places. A majority wrote about music in their lives.

Following small group sharing the team members reassembled and reviewed the dynamics of being in a small group. The retreat leader offered and expanded on the following thoughts.

For small group sharing to work two ingredients are necessary: taking each other seriously and really trying to listen. When your point of view and your feelings are listened to, you feel really heard. Hearing is believing the non-verbal and the words. It takes time to build up familiarity with each other in the group. Over time the group unleashes lots of energy for health, wholeness, and movement. As the group midwives its birth and growth, it goes its own direction. Participating in the life of the group is creative and re-creative of team members. After sharing, each team member can ask for feedback, i.e.: what did you hear? The group can begin and end holding hands or with some other ritual of your design, so that you are in touch.

⁵ Barbara Bryant, "Friends," in Beginning Again (College Station, Tex.: n.p., 1990), 7.

⁶ Denean, "All My Relations," Fire Prayer (Golden, Co.: Etherean Music, 1991) audiocassette.

All were asked how small groups were going. Individuals reported out by groups as follows. One group experienced "walls down and immediate trust," "opening up quickly based on our revealing ourselves to each other," "similarities interlock us," and "we can relate to one another's feelings and past experiences." Another group stated, "we trusted from the start, we got into feelings and the subject matter, we understand where a person is coming from, and we are bonding well," and "it's strange how people with different stories can pick out points that relate and the bonding is great."

Another group expressed a similar group experience. "Trust is presumed, we have no hesitation, each of us relates well to each others' stories, we see similarities, we build bonds and we get closer all the time." "We see each others' growth and our directions changing which helps build trust; we have been through all this together; it is satisfying; then I can see and share my own growth." "When someone else writes so clearly it is enlightening to me."

Another group continued, "Trust was never in doubt, we took it for granted and inevitably we found common or non-common bonds." "It is going well. I don't go along with the crowd, never did before, but I find a common bond. As other people give me ideas, I'm never done writing." The last group expressed, "was comfortable because I felt heard, we really listened to each other"; "our group is very

special with a very good trust level"; "some of our feelings are the same, we are knitted together and strongly bonded"; "we remarked to each other about our writings."

Four team members in one group added a new category in aesthetics in their writings and sharing, namely nature. One related nature to art and another nature to sports and movement. Members of other groups upon hearing this welcomed this addition. It is quite understandable to this writer how nature is a large part of the aesthetic experience of life for residents of Hawaii.

Los Angeles team members likewise commented on their small group experiences. "Trust was not a difficult issue. Knowing each other we share at more length. We touch on things that carry more meaning to us. We expand on our similarities and share the commonalities of our journeys. Deep sharing is special. There are common threads, golden strands interwoven throughout our lives."

Another group relayed, "There was instantaneous trust, no threat, down to our core feelings, wonderful sharing that was fulfilling." Another group revealed, "We could be ourselves with each other, it feels pretty powerful, I was trying while the three others went deep."

One group expressed their comfortableness with each other. "It's wonderful deep sharing. I have three new good friends. Not by coincidence are we four in one room. I always enjoy the experience."

Another group of three expressed their group experience with these words. "Here we are celebrating, we trigger one another. Having been away from your experience and community, it feels good, home. This is beyond words to have this weekend with you all, very beautiful, very special. We discover the common threads of our background."

Another group related, "From the beginning we were comfortable sharing, listening, enjoying each others' company, enjoying our discussions after reading aloud. We listened for specifics and it was intense. It feels interlocking. The common bond is incredible. I do not feel ashamed, have no fear of being betrayed and the bond is safe. Our renewal has a balance of grief and joy."

In one group one team member shared, "I feel safe and comfortable; common threads keep growing and this is miraculous in an interdenominational group." Another felt "apprehensive; I've been away from the spiritual and a bit out of touch, so I'm rusty in writing."

The last group also focused on the spiritual. "My personalized spiritual walk is making me so joyful. The bonding keeps growing. I've had lots of spiritual growth and change in the last six months."

Saturday after dinner the team members continued their program time with Theme 4, "My Spiritual Journey." On a red tablecloth lay a crown of thorns, a straw crucifix, a carving of the madonna and child, a statue of the pieta, and

the large lit white candle,

In

Los Angeles the worship center also included sand, small sticks and stones, and pieces of shells and broken glass. A poem entitled, "Today and Yesterday," by Barbara Bryant⁷ about changes in one's life and God's eternity was read aloud. The song, "Flesh and Blood," written by Shane Howard and sung by Mary Black about sharing and understanding our mutual life stories of pain and hurt was played.⁸

The theme was introduced to include pains and struggles encountered on our spiritual journeys as represented by some of the focus items of the worship center as well as progress and hope indicated in the candle's light and poem. Team members were instructed that this theme focused on their spiritual history and that an upcoming theme would give opportunity to reflect on their present-time spirituality. After prayer team members were sent off to write, read those writings in small group and share. The bell brought them back to the large room for a follow-up activity.

On the worship table was a glass dish filled with water surrounded by glass beads. The team members were asked to reflect on whom they are spiritually indebted to, such as a parent, spiritual family member, mentor, sponsor, spiritual guide, hero, heroine, or fellow journey-maker. Then they

⁷ Barbara Bryant, "Today and Yesterday," in Beginning Again (College Station, Tex.: n.p., 1990), 9.

⁸ Mary Black, "Flesh and Blood," The Holy Ground (North Hollywood, Calif: Gifthorse Records, 1993), audiocassette.

were to take turns naming these persons and thankfully dropping a bead into the bowl for each person. This activity brought tears of appreciation and gratitude to many faces and several expressed how moved they felt. On Saturday night the team members found on their pillows little gift boxes with a heart and the words "Jesus is the best gift of all" printed on them. Many continued talking into the night.

On Sunday morning the worship center was set for an elegant meal with pink and lace table cloths, pink cloth napkins, a bowl and silver goblet, a glass pitcher, and the large candle.

The poem, "Renewal," by Barbara Bryant about asking for and receiving wholeness from God was read aloud,⁹ followed by the playing of the song "Jubilee" sung by Mary Chapin Carpenter.¹⁰ On Theme 5, "My Spiritual Self," the following thoughts on jubilee were shared.

Jubilee is a time for celebration, anniversary, the 50th, a golden jubilee. In created patterns of work and rest, Sabbath brings balance in life, the mundane or hectic activities versus rest. This weekend is for relaxation, a break from the routine, a time for rejuvenation. As in the Old Testament in the seventh year land was overturned, left fallow for rest and replenishment, debts forgiven and slaves set free, the poor fed and sheltered, in a community spirit

⁹ Barbara Bryant, "Renewal," in Beginning Again (College Station, Tex.: n.p., 1990), 10.

¹⁰ Mary Chapin Carpenter, "Jubilee," Stones in the Road (New York: Sony Music Entertainment, Columbia Records, 1994), audiocassette.

of responsibility for one another, so too this Sunday is a sabbatical for team members to rest and be renewed, refreshed and refilled.

Imagine this to be a table of God's blessings. Imagine God filling these vessels for you. This table, the Lord's Table, is a portion of the Great Feast, the Final Great Banquet with God. You celebrate that the provisions are all here, given by God and a portion you can now see and claim.

After the sensitizing questions were distributed and read silently, the retreat leader suggested the following.

God nourishes you. As you go to an "All You Care to Eat" buffet you usually choose your favorites and maybe you sample or try some new items. Likewise with these questions. Try some new questions. And if much of this weekend has been heavy food, choose some "lite" items, go easy. Find balance for yourself by working the heavy and resting in the lighter ones. Develop your writing as you make yourself comfortable in order to continue to grow.

Dismissed in prayer to an hour of writing and after an hour of sharing, the team members were asked to share in the large group how they experienced the theme of spirituality and how they were progressing spiritually. Observations of Hawaiian team members follow. "This topic is very meaty. I finished the questions for other themes but this time I had to choose which ones I could answer. I liked writing on the most spiritual person." "I thought that I'd done all that I could and I was exhausted and I didn't want the heavy. But I chose to explore with hot-penning. As I went on my path with part of one question it worked like magic." Two others agreed with this team member.

"I thought I didn't have much to say but I could have

written for a week. Today it was too hard; I thought I would do lite ones. This brought me into spiritual experiences." "I wrote and wrote and then ended with my own question of 'who is my spiritual self?', so my work is cut out for me." "I appreciated the opportunity to go back and then come forward. I took it for granted. Now I'm pleased, more confident that I've made such progress. Now I really know I'm on the right path. A good question for me was 'when have you felt spiritually dried up?' because at first I thought it didn't apply, then I wrote." "I read all the questions to see what feelings would come up and explored them. Then one by one I let my images take me where I needed to go. I can focus next week where I need to. But I ended up asking, 'Where am I going?'" "I thought I'd already faced when my spirit was dried up, but I found two things I hadn't taken care of. I put them in my notebook. Not today, but I can make the choice to do it at another time."

"It made me re-evaluate things I believe in, like what is the Lord, trusting God? Who are the people guiding me? I thought there were none. When I write it comes out." "Last night on the spiritual journey questions I had a hard time. I followed the hot pen rules. I didn't like those questions. I rambled. It was a big risk. All those questions were so hard. Then I reached out to two people to help me. I built trust." "Questions I don't want to answer

I need to." "The most spiritual person, my mother, I took for granted. Now like her I'm encouraging an ill neighbor. I chant more and have more faith." "I put religious leaders on a pedestal, wholly Holy, but when I shared my disappointment in a religious leader it was a big step, a big revelation, so I don't put religious people up any more."

A few team members from Los Angeles responded as follows: "I got out of my head and into God's plan." "I experienced sadness and tears of grieving over attempts to kill the spirit. Now I have the joy of the resurrection." "I am praying in my writing. I am newly encountering that. God is talking back to me." "I am dealing with why God put me in a family where I am not spiritually fed. Now I have an affinity with Jesus."

The retreat leader closed the Sunday morning session by encouraging team members to continue the writing process at home throughout the upcoming year, to take a question or two on a regular basis and to write a few pages on each. The leader explained that after writing down and revealing something it loses its power (i.e., fear), it may not be as accurate as first thought (ask if it is more true or less true), and the writer can revisit, revise, or change opinions or perspectives. This weekend's writings can be re-read and amended in the future.

The worship center after lunch entailed a collection of

eight large cross necklaces on a white cloth background around the lit large white candle.

In Los Angeles the crosses laid on top of a mirror. Team members handled and commented on the particularities of the crosses while the group gathered. The poem, "Aspirations," by Barbara Bryant¹¹ was read aloud followed by a Native American song, "There is a Dream" sung by Denean¹² about the freedom found in following one's heart into one's vision.

Theme 6, "The Meaning of My Life and My Aspirations," was introduced with the following three points: (a) without a vision the people perish, (b) how one sees the future influences what one does tonight, and (c) a glimmer of your future energizes you now. The sensitizing questions were distributed and read silently and the team members were dismissed to write for a final time. After the last small group sharing, team members gathered for the final large group processing.

The retreat leader asked, What gifts will you take with you from this experience? Hawaii team members called out: friends, love, understanding, encouragement, empathy, listening, resolution, trust, enjoyment, sharing, acceptance, complexity of the human being, hope, faith,

¹¹ Barbara Bryant, "Aspirations," in Beginning Again (College Station, Tex.: n.p., 1990), 8.

¹² Denean, "There is a Dream," Fire Prayer (Golden, Co.: Ethereal Music, 1991) audiocassette.

compassion, growth, faithfulness, completion, and discovery. The Los Angeles list was similar. The team leader reflected that the stuff is already inside you, the many resources used in this Beginning Experience ministry are inside you. This deep communication, this communion, within yourselves in writing and in touching each others' souls is a form of prayer.

Then the retreat leader commented, "How will you keep your spiritual growth rolling? As in physics inertia is overcome, it's easier to keep going than to start from zero, keep it in motion." Answers included: by forgetting and living anew, by seeking nourishment from others, by making and taking time for God rather than fitting God in, by practicing new steps such as, speaking one's truth, listening more intently, validating others and honoring what they say, and by beginning the day in prayer.

Team members were encouraged to continue writing in the year to come on the six themes of sensitizing questions provided. "You have drawn branches, now put sub-branches and leaves on the framework of your tree. Build on what you've already written." To end this theme, Thomas Merton's "Prayer" about following God's will was read aloud.¹³

In Hawaii an ecumenical worship service was celebrated by all team members. Catholic team members had already been

¹³ Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958), 83.

to Mass early that morning at a nearby church. (In Los Angeles a guest priest came in to celebrate the Mass with all team members present.) The worship center for the ecumenical worship service held a knotted rope with fashioned tears around the large candle,¹⁴

The retreat leader pointed out how the rope connected persons' pain and suffering, represented in small paper tears, with each other and with God's suffering, represented in the large red clay tear. Also it was noted how the knots became smaller and scarcer in the process toward the center. During the service "Instruction," another poem by Barbara Bryant based on Psalm 32:8-10 was read aloud.¹⁵ Holy Communion was shared. The sermon preached by the retreat leader follows.

I'd like to talk with you this afternoon about how God's Spirit is involved in our lives. The perspective on God and humanity which I'm going to describe for you comes from a professor I studied with at the School of Theology at Claremont named Dr. Frank Rogers Jr. Dr. Roger's theology, that is, his ideas about God's involvement in human life interested me so much that I used them as the basis for this doctoral project of mine in which you agreed to participate. I thank you again.

According to Dr. Rogers, God's Spirit, which I also call the Holy Spirit, moves in our lives in three ways. It's the rhythm of God, pulsating through our being. We as Christians can be aware of and allow God's Spirit to move us. As we

¹⁴ The symbolic design of rope and tears was constructed by students in the course "Spirit-Centered Education," School of Theology at Claremont, Fall 1994.

¹⁵ Barbara Bryant, "Instruction," in Beginning Again (College Station, Tex.: n.p., 1990), 11.

participate in these three-fold movements of God's Spirit we will experience spiritual growth.

The first movement of God's Spirit is when we find that God is already here, reaching out to us before we even start searching. God's grace, all of God's goodness, is already available to us for the taking. God's loving care surrounds us and we start becoming aware of God's presence in and around us. The Spirit of God is the initiator, the one who opens our eyes, raises our awareness. This process happens gradually for most Christians, suddenly for a few. It's a conversion, a realization that God, the primary actor in this drama of life, has reached out in love, offering us the free gift of the Spirit's gracious presence and acceptance.

As we are in contact with God's Spirit of perfect love and holiness, we become aware of our own shortcomings, our own failures, our own weaknesses. We find that God is truly whole, truly Holy, true Other, and we fall short. We come face to face with and acknowledge our own limitations. But the Good News is that we don't have to despair. Because the face of God gazes lovingly upon us. With mercy God's arms open wide to invite us onto God's lap. God's loving arms embrace us. Like the statue we saw earlier, the pieta, God holds us when we're broken and in pain. We've all known this pain in a major way, in the trauma in the loss of our spouse, haven't we? And we've encountered our failures, mistakes, sins in miriads of other ways, I would venture to say daily. Yes, the little deaths we bring on ourselves. The suffering we inflict on ourselves and others.

This first movement of God's Spirit is finding that even with our imperfections God loves us unconditionally. We no longer have to deny, minimize, or ignore our deficiencies. We can face the whole of ourselves, our good and our bad, our bright spots and our shadowy parts, because God's Spirit accepts the whole of us. God knows the personal pain and suffering that have been part of our fabric, and God understands with compassion. In the midst of our brokenness we can rest in the Spirit's grace and soak in God's presence.

Dr. Rogers wanted to describe this first movement of the Spirit going in a particular direction. It's a movement down, like a descent, like God descending in the incarnation. God took on human form. In the man of Jesus, God came to us, experienced life as we do, became intimately

acquainted with the pain of human existence, felt our wounds, and took our burdens upon his own being. In this process we experience that God's Spirit comes to our aid in the form of many people.

In B.E. (Beginning Experience) we have found persons who incarnate God's loving care for us. In B.E. we found that we could be ourselves: with failed marriages, with the messes of our lives, with all our foibles and blunderings. As I often say, like a basket case. B.E. has been that accepting, loving community. Because of God's Spirit in the team members we have experienced support. In this community we can be honest about who we really are and show our vulnerabilities to each other. In this process God's Spirit soaks us with a healing balm. We begin to feel centered and at peace with ourselves and God.

Do you sense that you are grounded in God's gracious love? As you face your own ill-advised choices and the dead-ends in your life, can you come to terms with yourself, without judging and blaming yourself? Are you able to let go of mistakes and self-recriminations because God's Spirit loves you no matter what?

We are forgiven through God's action in Jesus Christ. We are touched at our inner-most depths by God's descending Spirit. We are surrounded, held, and sustained by God's grace. We experience and inner peace, a reconciliation with God and with ourselves. And we receive loving support from others in community with us. That is the first movement of the Spirit.

Now, the second movement of God's Spirit is God lifting us up to our potential for goodness. Using our inherent personal and social strengths, we live in the glory of God. We come to appreciate our uniqueness as a creation of God. We cherish the gifts within us which come from God and use them in gratitude. We discover our inner beauty and allow God to polish us into precious jewels. We celebrate our particularities because God made us so. In this movement of the Spirit, God delights in our joys, successes, and triumphs.

We learn that our pasts do not need to hold us back. God's Spirit can show us the lessons we can learn from our circumstances. Gradually we let go of the past, thereby experiencing personal healing and wholeness. We gain a sense of what we can control and we begin to take charge of our present. God's Spirit fills us, empowering us. We step into the fullness of life as God intended.

We feel fully alive. And we feel empowered to shape our future.

In this second movement we translate God's love into our relationships with others. We connect more genuinely with others. We relate more authentically, depending on our level of closeness, trust, and intimacy.

Dr. Rogers described this second movement of the Spirit as going up, an ascent, God lifting us up as God lifted up Jesus in the resurrection. Similarly, we leave behind our past, for the past is dead and gone, and we step up to take control, where we can, in the present moment. Our chains are loosed and we enter into a new freedom. We are transformed. We come in touch with our uniqueness, giftedness, and inner beauty, and recognize the glory of God in us. We take responsibility for our present situation and future possibilities.

In B.E. we hot-penned reams of pages about our past in a sincere effort to release its hold on us. With inner work, multitudes of tears, and urgent prayers we struggled to let go of our marital relationships that were no longer. We began to heal and come to terms with our singleness in the present. We connected for the first time, or reconnected, with our God-given inner strengths and felt capable and in charge. We took courage to relate to others from our real self. We learned to make wise choices about trusting ourselves and others. We used discernment about levels of self-revealing in a variety of relationships.

Do you recognize the talents you have as gifts from God? Do you appreciate your inner beauty, God's creation? Do you cherish your uniqueness as God's will for you? Because God says "Yes" to you, do you say "Yes" to yourself and "Yes" to the potentialities in your life? Do you keep applying what you've learned? Namely, die little deaths daily--let go of what is gone, what cannot be, what ought not to be, and move forward in new ways, in new beginnings.

We are affirmed by the Spirit as God's good creation. Thus we affirm our goodness. We are transformed by the Spirit from death and loss to new life and new ventures. We are empowered to search for and find wholeness in our relationships with ourselves and others. We each enjoy ourselves as the real me and we experience ourselves as relationally more genuine and whole with others. So, we feel personally powerful and

relate to others with mutuality. That is the second movement of the Spirit.

Now, the third movement of God's Spirit is God moving us with radical hope that all will be reconciled. We come to understand that God uses us to extend God's compassion and justice to others. As we bear the power of God's love in our communities and our world, we usher in the reign of God. This third movement of God's Spirit in us begins with our feeling compassion for the suffering of others. We allow ourselves to empathize with others' pain. We connect our wounds with their woundedness. We move toward them with a tender heart, wanting for them health and wholeness. Regardless of our assessment of their situations or their ways of dealing with their circumstances, we feel moved to care and love unconditionally.

As we respond inwardly to their pain, we struggle to make some sense out of the suffering. Grounded in God's loving care, we realize that God has not abandoned anyone. So in the midst of every suffering God is present. Just as God was right there, dead center, in the crucifixion. And in that ultimate suffering, death on a cross, God emerged victorious. God's power over evil gives us the confident hope that Right and Truth and Goodness and Wholeness will prevail. As the storms rage around us, we can trust God to take care of us. We can hold on most assuredly to the fact that God's presence sustains us and eventually will redeem the world.

When we allow the Spirit to put us in touch with the range of human emotions and experiences, even the toughest ones, and we firmly claim a deep abiding trust in God's provisions through any devastating circumstances, then we can give of ourselves to others in pain in the power of the Spirit.

The direction of this third movement of the Spirit is going out, horizontally, to touch humanity. The Spirit through us reaches out to bring healing to others' wounds. In this movement the Holy Spirit pulsates out into the world with reconciliation.

Coming to B.E. we immediately felt compassion for others' pain because we carried similar wounds in our fabric. As we lived through each tough hour and day of trauma and loss, we found out we could make it because God brought us through. In the midst of our suffering God offered us hope for our future. Our pain diminished and our

confidence grew. We developed our stories of death or loss and resurrection or new life. We wrote and re-wrote those stories, clarifying for ourselves the causes of our pain and the source of our victory. Then in the ministry of reaching out as team members we were used by God for healing others.

Do you have the ability to feel compassion, to be moved inside by others' hardships, regardless of whether you agree with the choices they made that got them where they are? Do you feel grounded in confident hope in God's care and healing for you? Have you connected the death and resurrection of Jesus to your own story of the end of a marriage relationship and beginning of a new single life? And now that you've grown from your experience of loss and renewal, do you apply lessons of letting go and trusting God to start anew in other areas of your life? Do you keep exploring ways to share the newest parts of your story with others, thus challenging and stretching yourself? Do you continue to make yourself available as God's agent to heal others?

We feel connected to our neighbors in need. We have within us the radical hope that their needs can be met by God through us. We draw on the power of our story and gifts. We offer God's grace and our presence. We bear love and embrace others. Our actions are redemptive. Inspired and challenged by the Spirit we commit ourselves to continue to do our part in ushering in the reign of God. That is the third movement of the Spirit.

Dr. Rogers envisioned the three-fold movements of the Spirit like the heart beat of God. First, the Spirit moves down to draw together weary, down-trodded souls to soak them in the presence of unconditional Love. The face of God through supportive communities shares the burden of pain and suffering. In this movement the Holy Spirit awakens faith. We come to a knowing that we are accepted as we are. Second, the Spirit lifts up loved souls, endowing them with gifts. The glory of God shines as the Spirit fills people. In this movement the Holy Spirit empowers humans. We are transformed into holy beings and we step into the fullness of life. Third, the Spirit moves outward, sending humanity into the world with confident hope. The reign of God is extended in human existence with responses of compassion and justice. In this movement the Holy Spirit stirs humans to participate in the transformation of creation. We feel compassion,

know we are grounded in hope in God, share our story, and reach out as God's agent to others. Down, up, and out. Down, up, and out. The rhythm of the Spirit in our lives. Amen.

In Hawaii the B.E. chapter president led a short ceremony of re-commissioning those team members who wished to serve for another year.

After a short break the team members in Hawaii and Los Angeles in their final session took the Spiritual Growth Inventory once more, this time evaluating themselves as of the very moment, post-retreat. Then the retreat leader reviewed with them the results of their pre-retreat inventories, going over the meaning of each statement. (Results of pre- and post-retreat inventories are written up in the next chapter of this project.)

In Hawaii a few team members who had been in charge of group recreation the previous day composed verses of a song. They taught the verses to the group and led the singing. This was reminiscent of Saturday night skit and song time on B.E. weekends. To the tune of "What Shall We Do With the Drunken Sailor," the group amid much laughter sang of their shared experience as follows: "Give us a pen and let it flow (3X) early in the morning. Put us in a room with a candle burning (3X) early in the morning. Ring the bell and gather us together (3X) early in the morning. Giving our worries up to heaven (3X) early in the morning. Receiving love and singing together (3X) early in the morning."

At the end of the team spiritual renewal team members

completed the weekend evaluation (see Appendix I). Each received an angel pin and the weekend closed with prayer and hugs.

Evaluation

The first theme, "A Major Turning Point in My Life," was the first and least risky theme, in that team members could choose either a positive or a negative turning point. This theme was the starting point of the weekend, the orienting theme for use in the methodology of guided autobiography groups. Team members grew through the challenge of choosing just one and surprisingly discovered that writing and sharing about lessons learned from a turning point in the past brought them into present branching points. This theme worked well in clarifying the process which would be used repeatedly over the weekend retreat and actually propelled them into the work of meaning-making of their lives.

The second theme, "My Family of Origin" addressed salient life issues that arose in childhood, shaping their identity and the course of their life. Team members explored the connections between their formative experiences, their major changes and adaptations along life's way, and their present sense of self.

The next theme on "The Aesthetic in My Life" served as a filler for the Hawaii chapter retreat. This project designer viewed it as a less crucial topic, therefore

expendable from the Los Angeles retreat. It was placed on Saturday afternoon, a lower-energy time. It served the purpose of keeping team members in the process of reflecting, writing, reading, and sharing. Team members were able to become better acquainted over a lighter topic.

The next two themes could be paired together as a unit for they seemed to be opposite sides of a coin. "My Spiritual Journey" covered one's past experiences in and with spirituality, while "My Spiritual Self" explored one's present-day spiritual experiences. They were split into two themes and two program times with a night's rest in between because of how meaty and heavy they were.

Moving along in a time line, the last theme of the weekend retreat, "The Meaning of My Life and My Aspirations," enabled team members to bring pieces together into a purposeful picture and to look forward into the ways they might live healthy lives and minister to others.

Team members of Beginning Experience are accustomed to writing on the weekends they facilitate. At those time they either write on a limited number of questions provided to participants which they have already answered on previous weekends or they journal without questions for guidance. Thus, receiving new questions on this retreat was invigorating and challenging. At the same time though some team members ambitiously tried to cover too many questions, disregarding suggestions to choose a few and leave the rest

to return to in private time in the months to come. They felt overwhelmed. Most team members stated that they found the questions excellent springboards for future reflection and writing and conveyed an eagerness to continue the process. They expressed appreciation for these numerous questions as a tool for further spiritual growth.

By the end of the weekend retreat team members were tired and had less energy to expend on the last theme. Again they were reminded that they could use these sensitizing questions over the whole next year to come as a avenue for further self-exploration through their journaling.

Throughout the weekend team members were invited to give the retreat leader input if any helpful terminology from their own traditions had been overlooked. None was forthcoming. One team member complained on the evaluation form that parts (unspecified) of the retreat were not consistent with Roman Catholic doctrine.

Team members verified that they benefitted from the guided autobiography group process. They reflected on their past experience, often choosing to answer questions new to them which dealt with their spirituality. They recounted how they gained new insight and fuller access to their past experiences by looking at the spiritual strands weaving through them. Some came to new conclusions about the role of spirituality in making meaning out of their lives.

In their small groups, rules about beginning and ending times, confidentiality, warm acceptance, active listening, communicating in I-messages, offering open-ended supportive feedback, staying focused on topic, affirming linkages between them, and sharing group leadership and discipline were established and followed without difficulty. Their ease in fostering such successful groups came from their frequent experiences in leading such groups and their understanding that adherence to these guidelines would ensure the efficacy of their shared time.

In their large group feedback time team members reported that they kept focused at the deepest levels of sharing feelings, experiences, pain, problems, and resolutions, and future intentions. They reported back that their groups moved quickly with trust into connecting by unanticipated similarities and bonding. Effective sharing, group work, and personal growth resulted, they reported. The only resistance encountered was that a few team members felt blocked when wanting to start writing, in anticipation of having to read their writing aloud later. These team members were not accustomed to reading aloud their answers in small group, but they committed themselves to trust the process and let their pens flow from their inner depths. And one team member avoided reading aloud, choosing instead to answer team members' questions on the topic.

The following are team members' comments from Hawaii as

listed on the weekend evaluation form.

Regarding the large group program (group size 17): very good, enjoyed all, good to have a focus for questions, well planned, excellent, good to come together, introductions to activities very explicit, not rushed but on target, tied together themes, very good organization of scheduling, great.

On themes and sensitizing questions: good for me but some seemed repetitious, great--moved to a wonderful culmination, lots of questions--sometimes this was fine because it allowed me to choose, but by the last item on the agenda I was getting weary of writing and talking, very appropriate but I would have liked one or two more themes and cut down on the writing time on some subjects, the questions were great, good and difficult some times but always triggered something, excellent, great in that they made me search myself, lots of inner questions that really helped hot-penning and tapped and jogged our inner deep feelings, I felt they were very thorough--some more than I wanted, good but at times too many questions to answer, penetrating and challenging--brought growth, enjoyed the variety and number of questions to choose from, excellent subjects--difficult many times but a second opportunity to write on it if I skipped it, great.

On small group sharing: rather good, a miracle of trust and commonality, wonderful again, great, good, very good,

excellent sharing, trust and confidentiality made sharing easy, laughter and tears--both were great, very good--sharing with two others was easy to cover back and forth on everything, powerful--immediate trust and bonding--the best I have known in three years, as always it works and brings me something to work on, excellent--perhaps the most valuable part of the program; excellent bonding, sharing, input and evaluation was firm, friendly, loving, caring and thoughtful, excellent support, great.

On the ecumenical worship service: very different but good, great, too long talk, good, excellent, it was touching to see others giving the bread and juice to one another, with music and message very spiritual, communion impressive, I was very touched, enjoyed this very much, meaningful--it is good to have other perspectives, excellent, I particularly enjoyed the sharing during communion, very original and touching, I prefer to not share the same cup of germs.

Regarding the Spiritual Growth Inventory: very interesting to see the differences, interesting, really appreciated the leader's project and hard work, very good, useful, good, great, amazed at the results--we all have grown, questions are good, a good way to teach growth and milestones were good, excellent, good to check the comparisons of growth, very interesting and worthwhile and good to feel my growth, interesting comparison, great.

On item #12: "This provided for my spiritual renewal...": yes and I really needed it, yes and I can't believe it, yet it did, the family of origin and my spiritual journey themes, very well, in more ways than I anticipated, yes, yes it was great, getting in touch with my spirituality, an added sense of peace and showed me progress I hadn't known I'd made, writing, yes--it penetrated me and stretched me and made me much more aware--it brought growth and a positive comforting feeling, good, yes--the questions helped me address where I am at, it was added nourishment for my spiritual journey, excellent--time to reflect and journal on wonderful issues which I am too busy to consider daily.

On #13: "This provided for team building...": very much so, good bonding as we worked, yes it did, small groups were great to be in again, I believe so, yes, this also was great for it, brought me closer to team members I hadn't know well before, good, sort of--we could do more in this area with more interaction with all team members--not just small group, I loved getting to know the two other team members and I'd love more team interaction, wonderful group to be with.

On #14: "I achieved my personal goals...": yes, yes I am energized, I didn't know what to expect but came away with many new discoveries and very pleased, more than--much more, I need to really evaluate myself, of spending more

time in prayer and taking care of myself, I found some new things out about myself, yes--I feel very good with where I'm at, my spiritual journey is most important to me and I achieve this in a variety of ways, yes--I gave to myself--what a start, yes--only came to fellowship.

The Los Angeles team members evaluated the weekend retreat as follows. Regarding the large group program (group size 33): good, excellent, great imagery with beautiful and moving music, inspiring, very inspirational, okay, very good, a little stiff but good group management and excellent song selection, very nice to hear everyone's comments and great for group strengthening, very inspiring, interesting, just right--helpful instruction but not preachy, songs and poems and center pieces were well thought out, well presented and would have liked more time to share in large group, not enough preparation on questions, good, very good--I loved the focus point items in the center of the room, very good and informative, very well put together, I like the songs and the words to the songs, different and enriching, I enjoyed the poetry and music a lot, having words to the songs was thoughtful--well prepared and planned, encouraged participation from almost everyone, liked request for feedback, nice and to the point, good sharing, generally productive and opportunity to touch on feedback, well done, excellent, somewhat slow.

Regarding the themes and sensitizing questions: very

—

good, excellent, thought-provoking, universal, relevant, valuable and motivational but too many and too much repetition--also not all are pertinent to Catholic doctrine, my favorite was family of origin and show where I came from, excellent questions, good questions, excellent and inspired, very good--helped me with a lot of issues I did not expect to explore, in depth--thought-provoking but too many--good if used as guideline, such a lot of effort and work--congratulations, helped me to touch base with much needed areas that I need to examine to build on; would have liked more time or less questions to dig deeper, good until last two sections on Sunday--too much head and not enough heart feelings, well thought out, very good--a variety to allow choosing a springboard to write from, they flowed well but too many to answer--I would have preferred a few central questions and the additional questions given after for continued journaling and growth, excellent-probing-challenging, very good, very helpful, great themes and lots of questions to choose from--good time, wonderful-powerful and enlightening, questions were very good: thought-provoking and feeling-provoking, very well thought-out--some of the questions were way above where I see myself now, thought-provoking and stirred feelings and repressed memories, the spirituality questions were right on target, very heavy, very good in stimulating the thoughts, loaded with much relevant substance, difficult but excellent, they

were hard to stay focussed on, very good but somewhat repetitive.

About small group sharing: excellent, too long--needed more writing time, so valuable, fabulous, possibly would have liked five people instead of three, wonderfully fulfilling, very good, went very well--we really enjoyed each others' writing and sharing--learned a lot--bonded, wonderful-powerful-helped me a lot, great, sharing was honest even when I was in my head I was told tactfully and honestly--greatly appreciated, B.E. quality--in depth from the heart, excellent whoever finally put us together, all we did was read--perhaps some additional questions to discuss in small group would have helped build stronger bonds, great--close--trusted them completely, very good, went well, the common B.E. background of all was necessary to generate the instant trust within the group, even if we never met before, wonderful, very deep and honest--empowering, great, very well, powerful and the best part, size and time was fine, B.E. team members are good listeners so it was a joy to share, time worked out well, I like reading our writings and then discussing it after--makes us more connected with each other, mirrored results reassured us that we were all on the same journey--we just went about it differently, easy--authentic, great group--great people, open and willing.

Regarding the Spiritual Growth Inventory: excellent,

educational, worthwhile--relevant, benchmark, okay, don't know if the statistics between surveys is of great meaning since one taking both surveys at the same time would of course make the results of the second be higher, very interesting, support to logical people that B.E. works, very well done and interesting, great, was most enlightening, thanks for sharing this--it helped me to focus on various aspects of my growth, interesting and revealing, a little dry--too much head thought, clear, well thought out, informative, eye opener, interesting and a realization that I still need to grow--have a way to go--eye opener, I'd like to see the final results, good, B.E. definitely helped us a lot in our healing, but we have done other programs too simultaneously--how do you account for this?, our journey as a group, good idea, very good--I need more time to write, interesting questions and interested to note my own scores, detailed and searching, new to me and great sharing of concepts, thought-provoking.

On item #12: "This provided for my spiritual renewal": very much, yes, somewhat, greatly, came at just the right time, I was pleased, absolutely, definitely, not really--just affirmed it, good, it will be as I continue, excellent, got me started, again enlightening, what I hoped for, good, it was good to stop and reflect, springboard.

On item #13: "This provided for team building...": very much, definitely, yes, well, some--more personal, hopefully

I can get back involved, absolutely great, not really--just in small group, excellent, great, absolutely, will help a lot, I am not clear on this, a closeness for the Los Angeles team, okay, very much so, worked well with group already trusting and cohesive.

On #14: "I achieved my personal goals": yes, almost, somewhat, some, good, I set many, yes--thank you, I wanted to reconnect and I did and also I found my spirituality again, no but will follow up at a time that is better for me mentally and spiritually, yes it was easy to follow along and thus expand, didn't know there was a goal, in a way, I think so--I came very open to anything, don't think so--I'm really tired, beyond them, about half way there, am getting there but personal goals are ongoing I know, absolutely, started me again, I had different goals, I forgot what I said but did get a lot out of it.

Chapter 7

Spiritual Growth Inventory Results

Team members were required to complete two copies of the Spiritual Growth Inventory before the weekend. Although only one set of scores were necessary for a pre-retreat testing, two takings of the inventory were used to increase the validity of the scores. It was believed that unproctored registrants would read the statements with more care and rate themselves with more thoughtfulness when completing it a second time (see Appendices C and D).

The first taking of the inventory was viewed by this writer as a dry run. For this first taking registrants could choose a date in their past. The instructions indicated that they were to assess themselves as to how they were prior to their first Beginning Experience (B.E.) weekend, indicating the month and year of that weekend. This was the most variable date, ranging from four months to fifteen years earlier. The second taking of the inventory was the day of registration. Understandably the second assessment can be considered more valid because: (1) the inventory was more familiar; and (2) the time period about which they assessed themselves was that present moment.

The results of the two pre-retreat inventories for Hawaii and Los Angeles are charted below.

Spiritual Growth Inventory Scores (average)
Pre-retreat Hawaii

#	previous to first B.E. weekend date	on registration day	difference
1.	3.4	4.4	+ 1.0
2.	3.0	3.9	+ 0.9
3.	1.8	3.9	+ 1.1
4.	2.4	4.1	+ 1.7
5.	2.0	4.1	+ 2.1
6.	1.7	4.2	+ 2.5
7.	2.1	4.3	+ 2.2
8.	1.9	3.5	+ 1.6
9.	3.6	4.7	+ 1.1
10.	3.1	4.4	+ 1.3
11.	2.5	4.7	+ 2.2
12.	2.2	4.4	+ 2.2
13.	2.8	4.3	+ 1.5
14.	3.1	4.2	+ 1.1
15.	2.8	4.1	+ 1.3

Spiritual Growth Inventory Scores (average)
Pre-retreat Los Angeles

#	previous to first B.E. weekend date	on registration day	difference
1.	3.1	4.2	+ 1.1
2.	2.5	4.4	+ 1.9
3.	1.8	4.0	+ 2.2
4.	2.5	4.3	+ 1.8
5.	2.2	4.0	+ 1.8
6.	2.2	4.1	+ 1.9
7.	2.3	4.2	+ 1.9
8.	2.7	4.0	+ 1.3
9.	3.3	4.6	+ 1.3
10.	2.6	4.3	+ 1.7
11.	2.0	4.4	+ 2.4
12.	2.4	4.4	+ 2.0
13.	2.5	4.4	+ 1.9
14.	3.0	4.2	+ 1.2
15.	2.8	4.1	+ 1.3

Average scores rose significantly in all fifteen categories from the date prior to the B.E. weekend to the date of registration. This writer concludes that many registrants in the taking of these two inventories at one sitting and in focussing on the spiritual growth which occurred during their time in B.E. may have been crediting B.E. for their growth. In other words, comparing the two pre-retreat inventory scores may be seen as a measure of the

success of B.E. in many registrants' minds. In fact on the retreat several team members spoke of their growth this way. One team member challenged the taking of the inventories this way. In her written evaluation she stated that her growth between the dates of the two pre-retreat inventories was due to several involvements in her life in addition to B.E. Again, the purpose of this project was not to measure the success of B.E. or spiritual growth prior to the team renewal weekend. The purpose of the taking of two inventories was to get the most reliable scores possible as of the day of registration, so that those scores could be compared to the post-retreat scores.

Average scores in fourteen categories rose from the day of registration to Sunday afternoon, post-retreat.

Spiritual Growth Inventory Scores (Average) Hawaii

#	on registration day	post-retreat	difference
1.	4.4	4.7	+ 0.3
2.	3.9	4.9	+ 1.0
3.	3.9	4.6	+ 0.7
4.	4.1	4.5	+ 0.4
5.	4.1	4.5	+ 0.4
6.	4.2	4.6	+ 0.4
7.	4.3	4.6	+ 0.3
8.	3.5	4.2	+ 0.7
9.	4.7	4.9	+ 0.2
10.	4.4	4.8	+ 0.4
11.	4.7	4.8	+ 0.1
12.	4.4	4.7	+ 0.3
13.	4.3	4.7	+ 0.4
14.	4.2	4.4	+ 0.2
15.	4.1	4.1	+ 0.0

Spiritual Growth Inventory Scores (average) Los Angeles

#	on registration day	post-retreat	difference
1.	4.2	4.4	+ 0.2
2.	4.4	4.6	+ 0.2
3.	4.0	4.0	+ 0.0
4.	4.3	4.5	+ 0.2
5.	4.0	4.2	+ 0.2
6.	4.1	4.6	+ 0.5
7.	4.2	4.3	+ 0.1
8.	4.0	4.2	+ 0.2
9.	4.6	4.7	+ 0.1
10.	4.3	4.4	+ 0.1
11.	4.4	4.6	+ 0.2
12.	4.4	4.6	+ 0.2
13.	4.4	4.5	+ 0.1
14.	4.2	4.3	+ 0.1
15.	4.1	4.1	+ 0.0

The greatest increases were 1.0 and 0.5 (Hawaii and Los Angeles respectively) and the smallest increase was 0.1. Understandably, there was no change on #15 (involvement in church or faith community) over the weekend in Hawaii or Los Angeles.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Churches, other faith communities, and para-church organizations aim to enable the spiritual growth of their members, staff, and volunteers, so that they can carry out ministry as God calls them. Leaders in any ministry setting look for ways to promote spiritual growth in the lay persons who serve. Guided autobiography groups are valuable in nurturing spiritual growth.

Guided autobiography groups developed by James E. Birren use selected life themes for personal reflection and writing. Reading these life stories followed by sharing one's thoughts and feelings in small support groups provides for personal growth and community building. Sensitizing questioning on spiritual themes are stimulants for exploring and expressing past and current experiences in one's spiritual journey. Reviewing portions of one's life through journaling and in dialogue with a supportive group affords therapeutic and spiritual insight.

This project used guided autobiography groups as the vehicle for exploring personal and spiritual issues in the writing and sharing of lay people in ministry. Guided autobiography groups also served them well in community building, namely in developing deeper trust and friendships with each other, as testified to in the large group feedback comments. Furthermore, guided autobiography groups

facilitated growth in individuals as they gave insight and support to each other on their shared journeys. This project recommends guided autobiography groups as an avenue for continued spiritual growth of lay persons in ministry.

Sensitizing questions on six themes in this project provide a springboard for explorations and expression of one's spiritual heritage, practices, and vision. These couple hundred questions are uniquely designed to cover almost every conceivable aspect of spirituality. Such an exhaustive wealth of questions are invaluable for persons in ministry to write on for years. These questions are recommended for use in a myriad of settings where spiritual assessment and growth are desired. Guided autobiography groups in churches and other faith communities can utilize these questions for weeks, even months.

In another vein, this project provides a new tool, the Spiritual Growth Inventory. To the best of this writer's knowledge no instrument for measuring spiritual growth currently exists. Based on Rogers' theology of the three-fold movements of the Spirit and developed specifically for this project, this inventory is very easy to administer. Using a Lickert scale it is a self-assessment. It incurs no scoring time or costs. It does not compare scores to a norm. It does not require any formulas for computing outcome. It straight-forwardly lays out categories for self-evaluation. All statements provide a rating, "1," for

the option of "not at all," thus allowing room for those who do not connect to spirituality in certain categories. On the other end of the scale, the rating of "5," "very much," does not set people up for expecting perfection of themselves. And all statements are stylistically and grammatically similar, thus making the inventory easy to follow.

The Spiritual Growth Inventory considers spirituality in broad terms. Its inclusive categories were well-suited to the project's context of developing the potential of lay persons in ministry, embracing various Protestant denominations, Roman Catholicism, and some non-affiliated team members. The vocabulary of the inventory was found to be comprehensible and comprehensive by the diverse groups of participants. No clarifications on meaning were needed. Everyone who reviewed the inventory in field testing was pleased with the wording options and all who took it on the retreat felt satisfied that it was a clear, inclusive inventory of their spirituality.

This writer appreciates that the Spiritual Growth Inventory does not evaluate categories such as ecclesiastical membership, financial stewardship, practice of sacraments, frequency of using spiritual disciplines, interpretation of Scripture, numbers of philanthropic activities, or opinions and/or beliefs about current controversial moral, ethical, or political issues. The

Spiritual Growth Inventory does not count external manifestations deemed spiritual religious authorities. Rather, the Spiritual Growth Inventory is an assessment of one's inner beliefs, self-perceptions, understandings of God, feelings, views of life experiences, motivations, and actions.

For this writer the best aspect of the Spiritual Growth Inventory is that it is a tool for teaching and learning about spirituality. As demonstrated in the sermon given in the ecumenical worship service, the theology behind this inventory can be preached. Aspects of spiritual health can be taught line by line down through this inventory. Also by reading the inventory, persons in ministry can learn of what healthy spiritual living consists. In fact reading the inventory can be quite inspirational. Also, it can be quite challenging. As lay people in ministry assess themselves, they can identify areas where they want or need to stretch themselves. And as they mature they can refer to this inventory over and over again to mark growth achieved and to chart new territory desired.

A final contribution of this project is the structure and curriculum for a 48-hour or 33-hour weekend retreat. Any group of lay people in ministry, desiring to further their spiritual growth could commit themselves to write on the sensitizing questions of these spirituality themes and to read aloud and discuss their writings in small groups.

The retreat outlined herein can serve as a model for ministry leaders designing a spiritual growth event.

The retreat can also be adapted to a weekly support group setting. In this case the six themes could be used over six weeks. The meeting time could be 2-1/2 to 3 hours per week with writing on the sensitizing questions during the meeting. The first 30 minutes would be devoted to gathering, worship with a worship center, poem, song, and prayer, introducing the theme, and reviewing the sensitizing questions. The next 60 minutes would be writing. Another 60 minutes would be reading aloud and sharing. An additional 30 minutes could be used for break, refreshments, socializing, and large group feedback if there was more than one small group sharing. Or the meeting time could be shortened to 1-1/2 to 2 hours per week with the writing on the sensitizing questions as homework prior to each meeting.

In addition to the usefulness of this project as a model of a retreat or support group for lay persons in any ministry setting, this retreat curriculum is particularly valuable to team members of Beginning Experience as they are interested in their own personal and spiritual growth. Each regional chapter of B.E. requires of its membership participation in an annual event called "team renewal," focussed on personal and spiritual growth and team building. Each chapter designs its own program since no standard curriculum is supplied by its international ministry center.

This project offers this curriculum to Beginning Experience, International as a model for a Team Renewal Weekend. It can be used in its entirety as it was over a 48-hour period in Hawaii. Or it can be adapted to a shorter period of time, such as the 33-hour period used in Los Angeles. This project recommends the use of this curriculum for a Team Renewal Weekend by B.E. chapters when they wish to focus on spirituality. This writer is available to lead such a weekend.

This project recommends guided autobiography groups as an avenue for continued spiritual growth for team members of Beginning Experience. The structure of writing and sharing in small groups is almost identical to the current practice on B.E. weekends and support groups, so team members value these exercises. The only differences are that more questions are made available for writing choices and that reading aloud one's writing is a requirement. (Not all B.E. chapters hold firm to requiring reading aloud.)

Guided autobiography groups are recommended on a weekend retreat setting as this project describes. They are alternatively recommended in a weekly support group setting. A B.E. chapter might choose to offer a six-week support group for team members for their spiritual growth, in lieu of a weekend retreat.

One final word about statement #11 on The Spiritual Growth Inventory, "I give of myself through the sharing of

my story of loss and new life." This statement emerged specifically for team members of Beginning Experience because they invest much time and energy in writing and sharing their stories, they give enormously of themselves in this ministry, and the topic of their stories is dealing with loss and beginning again. However, #11 legitimately refers to other lay persons in ministry as well. First, proclaiming the Gospel or witnessing to the Truth is sharing one's story in light of the Word. Second, obedience to God demands giving of oneself. And third, all people in ministry experience losses of some kind and are empowered by the Spirit to begin again.

Appendix A

Spiritual Growth Inventory; Alternate Wordings

1. I encounter my personal pain and brokenness.
I encounter the depths of pain and suffering in my life.
I am aware of my own brokenness.
I come face to face with my limitations.
I encounter my own brokenness/shortcomings/limits/failure/weaknesses.
2. I embrace God's unconditional love and acceptance of me.
I am aware of God's unconditional love and acceptance of me.
I recognize God's unconditional love and acceptance of me.
I know God's unconditional love and acceptance to be true for me.
I appropriate God's unconditional love and acceptance for myself.
I make God's unconditional love and acceptance my own.
I accept God's unconditional love for me.
I trust God's unconditional love for me.
I know deeply God's unconditional love and acceptance of me.
3. I feel centered and at peace with myself and God.
4. I experience love through a supportive community.

- I experience God's love through a supportive community.
5. I celebrate my uniqueness and giftedness.
I am in touch with my uniqueness and giftedness.
6. I experience personal healing and wholeness.
I experience emotional healing and wholeness.
I touch wholeness.
I am in touch with health/wholeness.
I feel emotionally strong and whole.
I feel psychologically healed.
I feel psychologically whole (or more whole).
I gain strength through emotional healing.
I feel emotionally healthy.
I feel full of life.
I feel free of the past.
I step into the fullness of life as I let go of the past.
I experience wholeness as I let go of the past.
7. I take charge of my present and shape my future.
I can shape my present and future.
8. I connect more genuinely in various relationships.
I am more fully me in relationships.
I am more of the real me in relationships.
I am more real in my relationships.
9. I am moved with compassion toward others.
I feel compassion for the wounds of others.
I act with compassion toward others.

I embrace the wounds of others with compassion.

10. I have hope amidst suffering.

I trust God with confident hope (radiant hope/radical hope).

I live out of hope.

I live with hope.

I hold on to hope.

I feel grounded in confident hope in God.

I live with confident hope and trust in God.

11. I share my story of death and resurrection.

I share the story of death and resurrection in my life.

I share my personal story of pain and victory.

I give myself through sharing my story.

12. I reach out to bring healing to others' wounds.

I reach out as God's instrument to heal others.

I reach out as God's instrument for healing others.

I reach out as God's agent to heal others.

I reach out and am used by God for healing others.

I reach out with God's care to others' pain.

Appendix B

Letter of Invitation

BEGINNING EXPERIENCE OF HAWAII
TEAM SPIRITUAL RENEWAL WEEKEND

Dear BE TEAM MEMBERS,

Once a year we have the wonderful opportunity to meet together as a team for a weekend of our own personal nurturing and spiritual renewal.

Now, instead of focusing on the needs of the participants, we will be involved in the process of continuing our own healing and commitment to personal growth that started on our BE weekend. The TEAM SPIRITUAL RENEWAL WEEKEND will again be special and is provided as a part of our commitment to the BE team.

WHERE: St. Stephen's Diocesan Center
6301 Pali Hwy, Kaneohe, Oahu

WHEN: June 23, 24, 25, 1995

TIME: Renewal Weekend is full time, plan to stay
for the entire weekend.
Friday 6/23, arrive between 5:00-5:30 p.m.
(4:00 p.m. Neighbor Islands)

Sunday 6/25, closure at 5:00 p.m.

COST: \$95.00 to cover meals and lodging
[confidential \$ assistance may be
available, please contact _____
_____ 945-9415]

\$\$ DUE: By May 26.. Mail to _____

Neighbor Island team, please call _____ to coordinate
flights and arrive in Honolulu by 4:00 p.m.

TO BRING: (keep this letter for reminder)

LIGHT potluck for Friday dinner.
Snacks to share. (Minimal refrig. space is available.)
Personal items and comfortable clothing--leave
valuables at home.
Cushion or pillow for relaxation and floor activity.
Pen and notebooks.
May wish to bring umbrella, small flashlight, jacket.

Note: Bedding and towels are provided by St. Stephens.

Special program presentation for this year's renewal will be provided by Lyn Juckniess. Lyn was on the B.E. team as Spiritual Director and past President. She will be returning to Hawaii to provide the program and sends us this message.....

"For our ministry of reaching out to those who suffer, we need periodic spiritual refreshment and personal renewal. This Team Renewal Weekend will provide the opportunity for us to reflect on aspects of our emotional healing and spiritual journey. Using a process called guided autobiography groups, we will "hot-pen" on several themes with the aid of sensitizing questions. Then we will share what we have written in small groups.

Benefits of participation will include a deeper communication and communion with ourselves in our writing, a discovery of the many resources we use in B.E. that are already inside us and connection to each other as members of Christ's body in this shared ministry.

There are a few conditions which need to be met ahead of time in order to be part of this enriching experience.

....First, commit yourself to participate the full weekend and to write on all assigned themes on the renewal weekend and so indicate on the attached registration form.

....Second, complete all information on the enclosed registration form.

....Third, complete a spiritual inventory (TO BE MAILED TO YOU UPON RECEIPT OF YOUR REGISTRATION) and return it by June 16.".....

As you can see, it looks like this years renewal weekend will be quite a wonderful experience. I am looking forward to seeing all of you there. Because we are dealing with coordination of additional paperwork, filling out inventory, and Lyn arriving from the mainland, please respond promptly to all deadlines. Thanks!!!!

By May 26, 1995 - Please fill out and return the enclosed registration form and enclose your check!

I will then mail you a confirmation letter with two confidential spiritual inventories and further instructions.

Please mail these back by the deadline date - June 16, 1995.

It will surely be a rewarding weekend, give us a chance to focus on ourselves and provide us with a lovely place to love and be loved in God's light and joy. See you there!!

Appendix C

Registration Form

BEGINNING EXPERIENCE OF HAWAII
TEAM SPIRITUAL RENEWAL WEEKENDJune 23-25, 1995
ST. STEPHEN'S RETREAT CENTER

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

HOME PHONE _____ WORK PHONE _____

SEX: M F AGE: _____ CHURCH _____

SINGLE STATUS: (circle) SEPARATED / DIVORCED / WIDOWED

SINCE WHEN: _____

WHEN I DID MY B.E. WEEKEND: _____

WHEN I CAME ON TEAM: _____

WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO GET OUT OF THE TEAM SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

WEEKEND: _____

☐ I have enclosed my check for \$95.00 made payable to BE
OF HAWAII which covers the cost of food and lodging.☐ I commit to participate the full weekend and to write
on all assigned themes on the renewal weekend.

SIGNATURE _____

PLEASE RETURN BY: MAY 26, 1995

If you may need special accommodations, please call.

Appendix D

Pre-B. E. weekend date: _____

SPIRITUAL GROWTH INVENTORY

On each item below rate yourself by circling the number on the scale, 1-5, which most clearly described you before your first B.E. weekend.

1	2	3	4	5
not at all	a little	some	much	very much

1. I face and acknowledge my personal pain and brokenness.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. I trust in God's unconditional love and acceptance of me.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

3. I feel centered and at peace with myself.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

4. I receive God's love through a supportive community.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

5. I affirm my uniqueness, giftedness, and inner beauty.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

6. I experience personal healing & wholeness as I let go of the past.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

7. I feel empowered to take charge of my present and shape my future.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

8. I connect authentically in a variety of relationships.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

9. I feel compassion for the wounds of others.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

10. I live with confident hope in God in the midst of suffering.

1 2 3 4 5

11. I give of myself through sharing my story of loss and new life.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I reach out to bring healing to others who are suffering.

1 2 3 4 5

13. I enjoy a relationship with God that enhances my life.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I enrich my life with prayer.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I involve myself in the life of a church or faith community.

1 2 3 4 5

Use with permission only. Lyn Juckniess, School of Theology at Claremont, 5/95.

Appendix E

Today's date: _____

SPIRITUAL GROWTH INVENTORY

On each item below rate yourself by circling the number on the scale, 1-5, which most clearly describes you now.

1	2	3	4	5
not at all	a little	some	much	very much

1. I face and acknowledge my personal pain and brokenness.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. I trust in God's unconditional love and acceptance of me.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

3. I feel centered and at peace with myself.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

4. I receive God's love through a supportive community.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

5. I affirm my uniqueness, giftedness, and inner beauty.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

6. I experience personal healing & wholeness as I let go of the past.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

7. I feel empowered to take charge of my present and shape my future.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

8. I connect authentically in a variety of relationships.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

9. I feel compassion for the wounds of others.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

10. I live with confident hope in God in the midst of suffering.

1 2 3 4 5

11. I give of myself through sharing my story of loss and new life.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I reach out to bring healing to others who are suffering.

1 2 3 4 5

13. I enjoy a relationship with God that enhances my life.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I enrich my life with prayer.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I involve myself in the life of a church or faith community.

1 2 3 4 5

Use with permission only. Lyn Juckniess, School of Theology at Claremont, 5/95.

Appendix F

Confirmation Letter

March 20, 1995

Immediate Response Requested

Dear BE of LA Team:

In preparation for our Spiritual Renewal April 8 and 9 in Montebello, we have enclosed a map to the DePaul Center and your two confidential spiritual inventories to be returned in the stamped addressee envelope.

Fill out the first Spiritual Growth Inventory, rating yourself as you were prior to your first BE weekend, indicating the month and year of that weekend. On the second Spiritual Growth inventory rate yourself now, filling in today's date. Mail both forms immediately in order to have them tabulated by Lyn Juckniess, our program resource person, prior to the renewal. All inventory data, recorded by number, not name, will be seen only by Lyn and kept strictly confidential.

Please arrive at the DePaul Center on Saturday, April 8, at 8:00 a.m. in order to register, settle in and get a morning beverage at the snack area. Similar to a BE weekend, we cannot begin our spiritual renewal program until we are all present. We have wonderful plans for your spiritual enrichment and need your cooperation in staying on schedule. Please encourage your team mates to be on time and carpool if possible. We will finish Sunday at 5:00 p.m.

And now for some weekend details. Please bring snacks to share for the morning, evening, or a beverage, plus any gear you need for your choice of swimming, tennis, volleyball or basketball and a towel. These facilities are dormitory-style, so you may wish to bring a robe and leave your valuables at home.

We are anticipating a beautiful and rewarding experience for our team and appreciate your effort in setting aside this special time to be with your BE family. God bless you as you prepare to renew yourself and your BE commitment.

In Christ's love,

President

Renewal Registrar

Appendix G

SCHEDULE FOR TEAM SPIRITUAL RENEWAL WEEKEND (HAWAII)

FRIDAY June 23, 1995

5:00 p.m.	ARRIVE
6:00 p.m.	DINNER
8:00 p.m.	PROGRAM: Theme 1: "A Major Turning Point in My Life" (Includes: 15 minutes introduction of theme with worship center, poem, and song: 60 minutes writing by hot penning on sensitizing questions: 60 minutes reading aloud and sharing in small groups: 15 minutes large group reflection/team building.)
10:30 p.m.	CLOSING ACTIVITIES

SATURDAY June 24, 1995

8:00 a.m.	BREAKFAST
9:00 a.m.	PROGRAM: Theme 2: "My Family of Origin" (see above)
11:45 a.m.	Break
12:00 noon	LUNCH
1:00 p.m.	RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY
1:45 p.m.	Short Break
2:00 p.m.	PROGRAM: Theme 3: "The Aesthetic in my Life: Music, Art, Literature, Movies" (see above)
4:45 p.m.	FREE TIME - of your choice. Quiet spiritual music will be ongoing for your relaxation in the main conference room.
6:00 p.m.	DINNER
7:00 p.m.	PROGRAM: Theme 4: "My Spiritual Journey" (see above)

9:30 p.m. CLOSING ACTIVITIES

SUNDAY June 25, 1995

[For those wishing to attend a 7:00 a.m. Catholic Mass in Kailua, please contact us for details.]

8:00 a.m.	BREAKFAST
9:00 a.m.	PROGRAM: Theme 5: "My Spiritual Self" (see above)
11:45 a.m.	Break
12:00 noon	LUNCH
1:00 p.m.	PROGRAM: Theme 6: "The Meaning of My Life and My Aspirations: (see above)
3:30 p.m.	ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE and RECOMMISSIONING
4:30 p.m.	TAKE POST-INVENTORY, REVIEW RESULTS of PRE-INVENTORIES, COMPLETE WEEKEND EVALUATION, CLOSING
5:00 p.m.	ALOHA until next year's renewal!!

Appendix H

Schedule for Team Spiritual Renewal Weekend (Los Angeles)

Saturday

8:00 a.m.	Arrive, Register, Settle in
8:30 a.m.	Begin, Welcome, Introductions, Announcements
9:00 a.m.	Theme 1 "A Major Turning Point in My Life" (includes 15 minutes introduction of theme, 60 minutes writing answering sensitizing questions, 90 minutes reading aloud and sharing in small groups, 15 minutes large group reflection/ debriefing.)
12:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Games
1:30 p.m.	Free Time
3:00 p.m.	Theme 2 "My Family of Origin" (see above)
6:00 p.m.	Dinner
7:30 p.m.	Theme 3 "My Spiritual Journey"
10:30 p.m.	Sing-Along, Socialize, Bedtime

Sunday

8:00 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 a.m.	Theme 4 "My Spiritual Self"
12:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Theme 5 "The Meaning of My Life and My Life Goals" (intro and writing)
2:00 p.m.	Mass
3:00 p.m.	Theme 5 (sharing)
4:30 p.m.	Take Post-Test, Review Results of Pre-Tests, Evaluation, Closing

Appendix I

EVALUATION OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL WEEKEND
June 1995

Please comment briefly on each item below:

1. Large group program...
2. Themes and sensitizing questions for writing...
3. Small group sharing...
4. Structured recreation...
5. Free time...
6. Worship Service...
7. Spiritual Growth Inventory...
8. Day use facilities...
9. Overnight accommodations...
10. Meals...
11. Timing of schedule...
12. This provided for my spiritual renewal...
13. This provided for team building...
14. I achieved my personal goals...
15. Suggested topics for the next team renewal...
16. Do you plan to attend next year's renewal....
17. What would you like to add to or delete from the weekend...
18. I would like to be part of the planning for the next team renewal weekend _____

Name

Appendix J

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

I hereby give Lyn Juckniess permission to utilize the results of my Spiritual Growth Inventories for the sake of statistical and comparative purposes in her Doctorate of Ministry professional project. I understand all information will be grouped and no individual identities revealed.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>SIGNED</u>	<u>DATE</u>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
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15.		
16.		
17.		
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19.		
20.		

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